

Introduction

The flood wiped out almost everyone. Even most of the animals, which God mandated people to steward, died (Gen 1:26–28; Gen 7:13–15, 21–22). A new era of humanity was about to begin, with Noah as the forefather of all (Gen 7:23).²⁷²¹ By mentioning that “God remembered Noah” as the pivotal focus of the chiasm (Gen 8:1 within Gen 6:10–8:19),²⁷²² Moses emphasized that Noah’s deliverance was no accident. The Lord himself saved Noah and his passengers,²⁷²³ fulfilling his promise of salvation (Gen 7:1–3).²⁷²⁴ In this instance, God’s remembrance caused him to send a wind to blow over the surface of the earth to increase the evaporation of the water. He also sealed the springs of the deep and the windows of the heavens (Gen 8:1–3).²⁷²⁵

Just as the Lord divided the waters on the second day of creation (Gen 1:6–7), he reestablished the separation between the watery deep and the sky.²⁷²⁶ The flood remained entirely under God’s control, rather than merely acting as a force of nature.²⁷²⁷

At the end of 150 days, the waters receded to their original locations and the ark came to rest upon the mountains of Ararat (Gen 7:11–12; Gen 8:4).²⁷²⁸ This range now lies in eastern Turkey, southern Russia, and northwest Iran.²⁷²⁹ Two and a half months later, the tops of the mountains appeared, echoing the separation of the waters from the ground on the third day of creation (Gen 1:9–10; Gen 8:5).²⁷³⁰

Noah wanted to ensure everyone’s safety before disembarking.²⁷³¹ After forty days, he released a raven to identify the direction of the nearest land mass. As expected, it never returned to him (Gen 8:6–7).²⁷³² Then, Noah sent forth a dove to determine whether low-lying areas had dried. She flew back to him, since the land at lower elevations remained inhabitable.²⁷³³ Noah waited a week and tried again. This time, the dove brought a sign of fertility and new life: a freshly plucked olive leaf.²⁷³⁴ When he repeated the experiment seven days later, the dove failed to return (Gen 8:8–12).

He removed the covering of the ark and saw that the land had begun to dry. After almost two more months, the process was complete (Gen 8:13–14). A new world emerged from its watery grave, heralding the onset of another era in human history.²⁷³⁵ Using our reckoning, Noah and his passengers remained on the boat for exactly one year.²⁷³⁶

²⁷²¹Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 127.

²⁷²²Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 299.

²⁷²³Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 157.

²⁷²⁴Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview*, 232.

²⁷²⁵Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 299.

²⁷²⁶Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 128.

²⁷²⁷Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 300.

²⁷²⁸Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 300.

²⁷²⁹Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 184–5.

²⁷³⁰Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 129.

²⁷³¹Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 302.

²⁷³²Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton, *IVPBBOT*, Gen 8:12.

²⁷³³Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 304–5.

²⁷³⁴Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton, *IVPBBOT*, Gen 8:12.

²⁷³⁵Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 187.

²⁷³⁶Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 305.

Based upon the failure of the dove to return and his own observations, Noah knew that they could inhabit the earth. Yet, he waited to receive a signal from God (Gen 8:14–19).²⁷³⁷

Before the flood, the Lord commanded Noah to bring various creatures on board to preserve their lives (Gen 7:2–3). Now God ordered him to release them so the animals could reproduce and fill the earth (Gen 8:17–19),²⁷³⁸ once again fulfilling the mandate of the fifth and sixth days of creation (Gen 1:20–28).²⁷³⁹ This time, the Lord included even the land animals in his blessing.²⁷⁴⁰

Noah did exactly as the Lord instructed. He and all his passengers disembarked to a renewed world, full of promise.²⁷⁴¹ Even today, we can trust God to keep his covenants with us. When the Lord remembers, he acts. He remains merciful and true to his word.

Noah's Grateful Response

1) Gen 8:20: Within the over-arching chiasm of the flood account (Gen 6:9–9:19, this section concerning the Lord's resolve to preserve the creation order matches his earlier determination to destroy it (Gen 6:13–22; Gen 8:20–22).²⁷⁴² Prior to the flood, the Lord promised to establish a covenant with Noah (Gen 6:18).²⁷⁴³

Although God would not formally pronounce his covenant oath until Gen 9:8–17, here Noah offered the customary sacrifice to ratify an oath (cf. Gen 15). This may reflect the smaller chiasm embedded in Gen 8:20–9:17.²⁷⁴⁴

A God's resolve to never destroy the earth or humanity again (Gen 8:20–22)

B Mandate to be fruitful (Gen 9:1)

C Legislation concerning blood (Gen 9:2–6)

Ā Command to be fruitful (Gen 9:7)

Á God's covenant and sign to never destroy all flesh again (Gen 9:8–17)²⁷⁴⁵

Moses began this passage by writing, "Then Noah built an altar to Yahweh. And he took from all the clean cattle and from all the clean birds, and he offered whole burnt offerings on the altar." Noah's very first recorded act upon disembarking involved worship.²⁷⁴⁶ For the first time in Genesis, the text explicitly states that someone built an altar and offered burnt sacrifices (Cf. Gen 4:3–5).²⁷⁴⁷

In the time of Moses, God designed altars for making burnt offerings (Exod 27:1–8; Exod 29:38–42). In fact, the Hebrew phrase "altar of burnt offerings" (*oloth bamizbeakh*) occurs 19

²⁷³⁷Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 306–7.

²⁷³⁸Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 187.

²⁷³⁹Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 129.

²⁷⁴⁰Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 187.

²⁷⁴¹Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 121.

²⁷⁴²Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 156.

²⁷⁴³Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose* (ed. D. A. Carson; NSBT; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 59.

²⁷⁴⁴Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose*, 61–2.

²⁷⁴⁵Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 127.

²⁷⁴⁶Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 307.

²⁷⁴⁷Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 189.

times in the Old Testament.²⁷⁴⁸ Noah's activity reflects his conviction that Lord delivered him safely through the flood (Gen 8:1–3).²⁷⁴⁹

Since Noah brought seven pairs of every clean animal on board, God appears to have intended and, perhaps, commanded this type of sacrifice (Gen 7:2–3).²⁷⁵⁰ Noah's act does not seem spontaneous,²⁷⁵¹ especially since the ritual meets the requirements for sacrifice which God revealed to Moses's original audience (Lev 11:1–8, 13–19).²⁷⁵²

Among the various types of sacrifices stipulated in the Mosaic law, priests offered a whole burnt offering more frequently than the other types.²⁷⁵³ Fire consumed the entire animal, except for the excrement and often the hide (Exod 29:10–18; Lev 8:21; Lev 9:7–11).²⁷⁵⁴ Although the text does not explicitly state the purpose of Noah's offering, people associated such sacrifices with making requests of the Lord (1 Sam 7:7–11).²⁷⁵⁵ These offerings could atone for sin and represent complete dedication to God (Lev 1:3–9).²⁷⁵⁶

Also called a “freewill offering,” this worship occurred with expectant joy or heartfelt petition. Thus, people made these sacrifices with a wide range of emotion (Lev 22:17–19; Num 15:1–3; 1 Sam 13:11–12).²⁷⁵⁷ After surviving the flood and living on the ark for a year (Gen 7:11; Gen 8:13–14), Noah made the offering to ratify a covenant his covenant with God. Those who traveled out of Egypt with Moses did the same at Mount Sinai (Exod 24:3–8).²⁷⁵⁸

a) Read Gen 8:20. How did the numbers of clean birds and animals brought onto the ark presuppose that they would be used for sacrifices? What were the purposes of a whole burnt offering? How would you describe Noah's emotions after surviving the flood and living on the ark for a year?

A Rest-Inducing Aroma

b) Gen 8:21: Noah's first recorded act upon disembarking was to gratefully sacrifice a whole burnt offering (Gen 8:20). Then, “the Lord smelled the soothing aroma and he said to himself, ‘I will not again add to the curse on the ground on account of humanity, even though the purpose of the heart of a person [is] evil from his youth. And I will not again exterminate all the living as I have done.’”

²⁷⁴⁸D. Kellermann, “עֹלָה/עֹלֶה” (*olah*), *TDOT* 11:96–113, 107.

²⁷⁴⁹Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 307.

²⁷⁵⁰Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 189.

²⁷⁵¹Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose*, 62.

²⁷⁵²Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 189.

²⁷⁵³Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 307.

²⁷⁵⁴Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 142.

²⁷⁵⁵Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton, *IVPBBOT*, Gen 8:22.

²⁷⁵⁶Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 189.

²⁷⁵⁷Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 307–8.

²⁷⁵⁸Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose*, 62.

In Gen 8:20, Moses employed imagery of the smoke from the sacrifice rising to the nostrils of God.²⁷⁵⁹ Appropriately, one of the verbs meaning “to ascend” (*alah*) contains the same root as the noun for a whole burnt offering (*olah*).²⁷⁶⁰ The technical term “soothing aroma” (*reah nihoah*) conveys that God accepted both the offering and the one who made it (Lev 26:27–31; 1 Sam 26:19; Amos 5:21–24).²⁷⁶¹

Here Moses engaged in word play with Noah’s name and his depiction of the type of aroma which the Lord smelled rising from the fire (Cf. Gen 5:29).²⁷⁶² Therefore, one commentator calls it “a rest-inducing odor.”²⁷⁶³ Due to the soothing smell of this sacrifice,²⁷⁶⁴ the Lord engaged in divine self-deliberation.²⁷⁶⁵ He made a covenant to never again disrupt his creation as he had via the deluge.²⁷⁶⁶

However, the Lord’s gracious attitude toward Noah does not represent a new development. After all, he already regarded Noah with favor and remembered him during the flood (Gen 6:8; Gen 8:1).²⁷⁶⁷ Nor did God promise to remove the curse of Gen 3:17–19.²⁷⁶⁸ Instead, he vowed not to add to the scourge he placed upon the earth after Adam sinned. This indicates that the flood went beyond the desecration which the Lord put in place after the fall.²⁷⁶⁹

Never again will God interrupt the natural order of creation by a catastrophic flood (Gen 9:9–11).²⁷⁷⁰ Just as the Lord accepted Job’s sacrifice on behalf of his children and his friends (Job 1:1–5; Job 42:7–9), here God viewed Noah’s offering as acceptable for all humanity.²⁷⁷¹ The pleasing aroma soothed his justifiable indignation (Gen 6:1–9).²⁷⁷²

God’s rationale seems paradoxical.²⁷⁷³ Gross sin caused him to send the flood to decimate virtually all people.²⁷⁷⁴ Yet, the Lord noted, “even though (*ki*) the purpose of the heart of a person [is] evil from his youth,” he would act with mercy.²⁷⁷⁵ Despite the continuation of human sin, the Lord would respond with grace toward those he created.²⁷⁷⁶ Indeed, the condition of human hearts made the divine promise of a covenant necessary. Otherwise, the threat of extinction would continually hover over creation (Cf. Rom 8:16–22).²⁷⁷⁷

²⁷⁵⁹Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 308.

²⁷⁶⁰Kellermann, “עֹלָה/עֹלָה” (*olah*), *TDOT* 11:108.

²⁷⁶¹Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 142.

²⁷⁶²Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 142.

²⁷⁶³Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 308.

²⁷⁶⁴Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 189.

²⁷⁶⁵Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 309.

²⁷⁶⁶Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, 62.

²⁷⁶⁷Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 189–90.

²⁷⁶⁸Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 142.

²⁷⁶⁹Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 190.

²⁷⁷⁰Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, 62.

²⁷⁷¹Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 190.

²⁷⁷²Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 143.

²⁷⁷³Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 309.

²⁷⁷⁴Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, 61.

²⁷⁷⁵Per Gesenius’ *Hebrew Grammar*, this nuance of the conjunction *ki* also occurs in Isa 1:15; Jer 4:30; and Neh 6:1, in addition to in other verses (p.498), <https://archive.org/stream/geseniushebrewgr00geseuoft#page/498/mode/2up>.

²⁷⁷⁶Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 142.

²⁷⁷⁷Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, 61.

Moses’s original audience also experienced the Lord’s willingness to overlook their sin due to the intercession of their leader (Exod 32:11–14; Exod 33:3, 12–17; Exod 34:4–10).²⁷⁷⁸ This scene from Noah’s life contradicts other Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) accounts concerning how the gods fared during the flood.²⁷⁷⁹

According to Enuma Elish, the gods tired of working to obtain food. So, they created humanity to feed them, mixing clay with a rebel god’s blood. Thus, they fashioned people to work as their slaves.²⁷⁸⁰ Without people making sacrifices, the gods had gone without sustenance during the deluge.²⁷⁸¹

The Atrahasis Epic recounted, “It was trying...of the gods. [Enki] was beside himself, [seeing that] his sons (people) were thrown down before him. Nintu (Ninhursag), the great lady, her lips were covered with feverishness. The Annunaki, the great gods, were sitting in thirst and hunger. The goddess saw it as she wept.”²⁷⁸²

Similarly, in the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Noah figure Utnapishtim told Gilgamesh what he did upon disembarking from his boat:

“I let out (all) to the four winds and offered a sacrifice. I poured out a libation on the top of the mountain. Seven and seven cult-vessels I set up, upon their pot-stands I heaped cane, cedar wood, and myrtle. The gods smelled the savor, the gods smelled the sweet savor, the gods crowded like flies about the sacrifice.”²⁷⁸³ Utnapishtim’s offering provided a feast for the starving gods.²⁷⁸⁴

The Old Testament does speak anthropomorphically about God eating sacrifices (Num 28:1–3; Judg 6:19–21; Ezek 44:7). Yet, the texts do not say that the Lord really consumes them (Ps 50:7–15; Judg 13:15–23; Isa 40:15–17).²⁷⁸⁵ God craves grateful hearts, not fat and blood (Exod 25:1–2; Deut 6:4–5; Deut 10:12–20).²⁷⁸⁶

Unlike the biblical flood account, in other ANE flood stories the chief god did not expect anyone to survive the flood.²⁷⁸⁷ For example, the Epic of Gilgamesh says, “‘Let not Enlil come to the offering, for he, unreasoning, brought on the deluge and my people consigned to destruction.’ When at length Enlil arrived and saw the ship, Enlil... was filled with wrath over the Igigi gods, ‘Has some living soul escaped? No man was to survive the destruction!’”²⁷⁸⁸ In contrast to our Lord, those gods were neither omniscient nor omnipotent.²⁷⁸⁹

²⁷⁷⁸Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 191.

²⁷⁷⁹Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 165.

²⁷⁸⁰“The Creation Epic” (Enuma Elish), *ANET*, lines 5.156–6.36, 68,

https://archive.org/stream/Pritchard1950ANET_20160815/Pritchard_1950_ANET#page/n93/mode/2up.

²⁷⁸¹Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 165.

²⁷⁸²Lambert and Millard, “Epic of Atra-Khasis,” in *RANE*, 30.

²⁷⁸³Speiser, “The Epic of Gilgamesh,” in *ANET*, 11:155–61, 95,

https://archive.org/stream/Pritchard1950ANET_20160815/Pritchard_1950_ANET#page/n119/mode/2up.

²⁷⁸⁴Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton, *IVPBBOT*, Gen 8:22.

²⁷⁸⁵D. Kellermann, “עֹלָה/עֹלָה” (*olah*), *TDOT* 11:110.

²⁷⁸⁶Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 308–9.

²⁷⁸⁷Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 165.

²⁷⁸⁸Speiser, “The Epic of Gilgamesh,” in *ANET*, 11:166–9, 95,

https://archive.org/stream/Pritchard1950ANET_20160815/Pritchard_1950_ANET#page/n119/mode/2up.

²⁷⁸⁹Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 165.

Read Gen 8:21. What soothed God’s wrath? Why was Noah the appropriate person to do this? What made this covenant necessary? How does the biblical account differ from others in the ANE?

A Promise of Stability

c) Gen 8:22: In this new creation after the flood (Gen 8:13–19),²⁷⁹⁰ the Lord’s blessing resulted in global stability. During our era the earth will return neither to primordial chaos nor to paradise (Cf. Gen 1:1–2; Rom 8:18–23).²⁷⁹¹ God will not add to the curse upon the ground (Gen 3:17–19).

The Lord promised, “As long as all the days of the earth, sowing and harvesting, and cold and heat, and summer and the beginning of winter, and day and night shall not cease.” This statement limits the continuation of these patterns to while the earth remains.²⁷⁹² Once again, the natural world would return to a predictable rhythm.²⁷⁹³ The Lord assures us of regular cycles of the seasons and times of day until we enter the new creation (Rev 21–22:5).²⁷⁹⁴ Although the human heart remains erratic, nature will not be (Gen 8:20–21).²⁷⁹⁵

God promised this in a series of four poetic couplets.²⁷⁹⁶ “Sowing (*zera*) and harvesting (*qatsir*)” alludes to the seasonal cycles of cold (*qor*) and heat (*khom*) necessary to maintain a food supply (Gen 1:11–12). “Day (*yom*) and night (*laylah*)” refers to the diurnal pattern which began in Gen 1:14–18.²⁷⁹⁷

The word translated as “cease” (*shabat*) comprises the verb corresponding to the noun “Sabbath.”²⁷⁹⁸ It points to something coming to an end (Gen 2:1–3).²⁷⁹⁹ God promised that ruptures of this order shall not occur while this world exists in its present form.²⁸⁰⁰

This concept flatly contradicts the premise of the fertility cults which many of the people of Israel soon accepted as reality (Num 25:1–9; 2 Ki 23:4–8).²⁸⁰¹ Adherents of these sects contended that the sexual activities of the gods directly affected the earth’s productivity.²⁸⁰² Consequently, people engaged in sacred prostitution to prompt the gods to act.²⁸⁰³

²⁷⁹⁰Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview*, 224.

²⁷⁹¹Walton, *Genesis*, 330–1.

²⁷⁹²Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 143.

²⁷⁹³Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 310.

²⁷⁹⁴Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 191.

²⁷⁹⁵Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 310.

²⁷⁹⁶Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 310.

²⁷⁹⁷Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 143.

²⁷⁹⁸Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “שָׁבַת” (*shābath*), *BDB*, 991.

²⁷⁹⁹E. Haag, “שָׁבַת” (*shābath*), *TDOT*, 14:381–6, 382.

²⁸⁰⁰Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 190.

²⁸⁰¹Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 310–1.

²⁸⁰²Eugene Fisher, “Gilgamesh and Genesis: The Flood Story in Context,” *CBQ* 32 (1970): 392–403, 393,

[Http://www.godawa.com/chronicles_of_the_nephilim/Articles_By_Others/Fisher-GilgameshAndGenesis.pdf](http://www.godawa.com/chronicles_of_the_nephilim/Articles_By_Others/Fisher-GilgameshAndGenesis.pdf).

²⁸⁰³Joseph P. Healey, “Fertility Cults,” *ABD* 2:791–3, 792.

In the Canaanite pantheon, the storm god Baal produced fertile rains. His consort Anath and the goddess Asherah were both highly sexualized figures. Their adherents believed that divine amorous activities increased the yield of their harvests.²⁸⁰⁴ One poem about Baal and Anath recounts this assertion by Asherah:

“Now, too, the seasons of his rains will Baal observe, the seasons... with snow; And [he will] peal his thunder in the clouds, flashing his lightning to the earth...The Maiden Anath rejoices, stamps with her foot so the earth quakes. There, she is off on her way unto Baal upon Zaphon’s summit, o’er a thousand fields, ten thousand acres.

“Laughing, the Maiden Anath lifts up her voice and cries, ‘Receive, Baal, the glad tidings I bring thee. They will build thee a house like thy brethren’s and a court like unto thy kindred’s. Summon weeds into thy house, herbs into the midst of thy palace. The mountains shall bring thee much silver, the hills a treasure of gold; they’ll bring thee god’s grandeur aplenty, a house of most pure lapis lazuli.’ Puissant Baal rejoiced.”²⁸⁰⁵

A hymn to the Mesopotamian goddess Inana makes an explicit connection to agricultural fertility. It claims, “You are she who creates apples in their clusters...You are she who creates the date spadices in their beauty.”²⁸⁰⁶

Read Gen 8:22. What are the implications of God’s vow to not add to the curse upon the ground? Why did he make that promise? How does this poem differ from other Ancient Near Eastern accounts? Why did fertility cults ensnare so many people in ancient Israel?

A Renewed Mandate

d) Gen 9:1: Within the overall structure of the chiasm depicting the flood narrative (Gen 6:9–9:19), God’s fourth speech (Gen 9:1–17) parallels his first oration in Gen 6:13–22.²⁸⁰⁷ This later passage specifies important details of the covenant which the Lord announced in Gen 8:20–22.²⁸⁰⁸ God’s adherence to this covenant does not depend upon human obedience. Nevertheless, the Lord required Noah and his descendants to abide by precise obligations. Therefore, this pact was not unilateral.²⁸⁰⁹

The beginning of this speech utilizes a common Hebrew literary device called an *inclusio* by repeating the blessing of Gen 9:1 in Gen 9:7.²⁸¹⁰ This technique uses repetition to bracket the

²⁸⁰⁴Healey, “Fertility Cults,” *ABD* 2:792.

²⁸⁰⁵Ginsberg, “Poems About Baal and Anath,” in *ANET*, IIAB5:64–97, 133, https://archive.org/stream/Pritchard1950ANET_20160815/Pritchard_1950_ANET#page/n157/mode/2up. Italics original.

²⁸⁰⁶Naomi F. Miller, “Symbols of Fertility and Abundance in the Royal Cemetery at Ur, Iraq,” *AJA* 117, no. 1 (1 January 2013): 127–33, 128, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.3764/aja.117.1.0127.pdf>.

²⁸⁰⁷Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 156.

²⁸⁰⁸Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 312.

²⁸⁰⁹Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, 63.

²⁸¹⁰Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 192.

enclosed material and to emphasize the unity of thought within those book-ending verses.²⁸¹¹ In this case, Gen 9:2–6 informs us how to fulfill the obligations of the decree in Gen 9:1 and Gen 9:7.²⁸¹² God called Noah, as a second Adam,²⁸¹³ to fulfill the original human mandate of Gen 1:28–29.²⁸¹⁴ These directives concern the proliferation of life, the preservation of life, and the provision for life.²⁸¹⁵

Moses wrote, “And God blessed Noah and his sons. And he said, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.’” This blessing parallels that which the Lord gave to Adam and Eve.²⁸¹⁶ In fact, this represents the third time the Lord delivered this directive to multiply and occupy our planet (Cf. Gen 8:15–17).²⁸¹⁷ Gen 10 and 11 unfold how Noah’s descendants experienced this divine decree.²⁸¹⁸

The Epic of Gilgamesh gives this account of the hero Utnapishtim's encounter with the god who had sought to annihilate every person on earth with the flood: “Thereupon Enlil went aboard the ship. Holding me by the hand, he took me aboard. He took my wife aboard and made (her) kneel by my side. Standing between us, he touched our foreheads to bless us, ‘Hitherto Utnapishtim has been but human. Henceforth Utnapishtim and his wife shall be like unto us gods. Utnapishtim shall reside far away, at the mouth of the rivers!’ Thus, they took me and made me reside far away, at the mouth of the rivers.”²⁸¹⁹

The chief god Enlil quickly overcame his rage over the survival of humanity. Instead of wiping out Utnapishtim and his wife, Enlil exiled them far away from the gods’ presence.²⁸²⁰

In the Atrahasis Epic’s account, human overpopulation prompted the gods to unleash the flood.²⁸²¹ So, the goddess of childbirth intervened after the deluge to appease the chief god:²⁸²² “In addition, let there be a third category among the peoples. Let there be among the peoples women who bear and women who do not bear. Let there be among the peoples the *Pašittu*-demon to snatch the baby from the lap of her who bore it. Establish *Ugbabtu*-women, *Entu*-women, and *Igišitu*-women, and let them be taboo and so stop childbirth.”²⁸²³ Here the gods initiated artificial barrenness, sterility, and a high infant mortality rate.²⁸²⁴

The account in Genesis rejects this curse.²⁸²⁵ Given that God regards reproduction with

²⁸¹¹Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation, 2nd Ed.*, 303.

²⁸¹²Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, 63.

²⁸¹³Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 313. “Second Adam (<https://www.theopedia.com/jesus-as-the-second-adam>)” is also one of the titles ascribed to Jesus.

²⁸¹⁴Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *God at Sinai: Covenant and Theophany in the Bible and Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 169.

²⁸¹⁵Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, 64.

²⁸¹⁶Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 192.

²⁸¹⁷Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 144.

²⁸¹⁸Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 192.

²⁸¹⁹Speiser, “The Epic of Gilgamesh,” in *ANET*, 11:189–96, 95,

https://archive.org/stream/Pritchard1950ANET_20160815/Pritchard_1950_ANET#page/n119/mode/2up.

²⁸²⁰Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 313.

²⁸²¹Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 144.

²⁸²²Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 313.

²⁸²³Lambert and Millard, “Epic of Atra-Khasis,” in *RANE*, 31.

²⁸²⁴Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 144.

²⁸²⁵Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 313.

his favor,²⁸²⁶ we should understand it as a privilege rather than a command to obey. Therefore, those who choose not to have children do not violate Scriptural obligations. The Lord gave this blessing for humanity to fill the earth. How wonderful it would be if we succeeded in utilizing our spiritual privileges as well as we have this physical one. Sadly, our world-wide population is approaching the limits which the earth can reasonably sustain.²⁸²⁷

In Gen 1:26–28, God commissioned Adam and Eve to expand the garden until Eden covered the whole earth. Then all could see that God rules through the work of his images (Eph 3:10).²⁸²⁸ Yet, the Lord did not give Noah and his family absolute dominion. He intended them to fulfill his intentions for the earth and its creatures. As those created in God’s image, he appointed people to fill the earth and rule as benevolent kings (Ps 8:3–9).²⁸²⁹

Read Gen 9:1. What made Noah a Second Adam? How does this verse mesh with Gen 1:26–28? In what ways does it differ from other Ancient Near Eastern views? How can you fulfill this commission?

Every Moving Living Thing

e) Gen 9:2–4: The Lord said to Noah and his family, “Fear of you and terror of you will be on every animal of the earth and on every bird of the heavens, on all which move on the ground and on all fish of the sea. Into your hand they are given. Every moving thing which is alive, to you will be for food. Like the green vegetation I gave to you, to you [I give] all.”

These verses contain some significant differences from the creation account (Cf. Gen 1:28–30).²⁸³⁰ No longer would humanity rule over the animals strictly in benevolence.²⁸³¹ “Fear (*mora*) and terror (*khath*)” in the animal world likely began after the fall.²⁸³² In the aftermath of the flood, the enmity between people and creatures escalated.²⁸³³ As a result, human authority yielded ghastly experiences for animals. A radically different environment exists than that of Gen 1:31.²⁸³⁴

After the flood, God deemed certain types of mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and insects acceptable for food. The Lord later declared some of these unclean (Lev 11:29–30).²⁸³⁵ The text refers to these animals by the way they maneuvered, “creeping” or “moving lightly” (*ramas*),

²⁸²⁶Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 144.

²⁸²⁷Walton, *Genesis*, 143–4.

²⁸²⁸Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, 81–2.

²⁸²⁹Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 67.

²⁸³⁰Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 313.

²⁸³¹Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose*, 63.

²⁸³²Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 192.

²⁸³³Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose*, 63.

²⁸³⁴Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 313–4.

²⁸³⁵R. E. Clements, “רָמַשׁ” (*rāmash*), *TDOT* 13:512–4, 512–3.

rather than by a scientific classification.²⁸³⁶ These small creatures served as prey for other species. They did not include cattle or domesticated animals.²⁸³⁷

“Into your hand they are given” conveys that God placed these creatures under humanity’s power (Cf. Gen 16:6; Gen 30:35; Gen 39:3–6).²⁸³⁸ Formerly, the Lord sanctioned only a vegetarian diet (Gen 1:29).²⁸³⁹ Now people can use animals for food.²⁸⁴⁰ Then, the Lord expanded what people could consume to include “every moving thing that is alive.”²⁸⁴¹ Just as for Moses’s original audience, this ruled out consuming creatures which were already dead when a person came upon them (Lev 22:8; Deut 14:21; Ezek 44:31). Otherwise—in this covenant with Noah—God did not clearly differentiate between clean and unclean animals.²⁸⁴²

However, the Lord commanded Noah to take seven pairs of every clean animal and bird onto the ark. That Noah sacrificed them indicates he knew the difference between the two categories. Given the mention of clean animals elsewhere in the flood account, God may have restricted people to eating clean animals (Gen 7:2–3; Gen 8:20).²⁸⁴³ In the ancient world, people rarely ate meat unless an animal died, or they sacrificed it. Most people who kept domesticated animals used them for their milk and their hair or wool.²⁸⁴⁴

God continued, “But flesh with its life, [that is] its blood, you shall not (*lo*) eat.” In Hebrew grammar, two kinds of prohibitions exist. The one used here is the strongest form. It has the nuance of “Thou shalt not!” as in the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:1–17). On this matter, the Lord expected strict obedience.²⁸⁴⁵

Adam could eat from any tree in the garden but one (Gen 2:16–17). Likewise, here the Lord gave Noah and his descendants one overt prohibition.²⁸⁴⁶ He would not permit consuming flesh with its blood. While remedies existed for eating an unclean animal, God would “cut off” (*karath*) those who ate blood.²⁸⁴⁷

In the Old Testament, God equated blood with life (Lev 17:10–16; Deut 12:23–25).²⁸⁴⁸ He viewed eating blood as equivalent to murder and treachery (Lev 17:1–4; 1 Sam 14:31–34).²⁸⁴⁹ Even today, people often take a pulse to determine whether life remains.²⁸⁵⁰ Within the sacrificial system, the Lord reserved both fat and blood for himself (Lev 3:2–3; 16–18). If people slaughtered an animal for consumption, they could use the fat for other purposes. However, they

²⁸³⁶ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “*remesh*,” *BDB*, 943,

<https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/942/mode/2up>.

²⁸³⁷ Walton, *Genesis*, 341–2.

²⁸³⁸ J. Bergman, W. von Soden, and P. R. Ackroyd, “*?*” (*yād*), *TDOT* 5:393–426, 399–400.

²⁸³⁹ Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, 63.

²⁸⁴⁰ Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 144.

²⁸⁴¹ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 192.

²⁸⁴² Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 144.

²⁸⁴³ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 192–3.

²⁸⁴⁴ Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton, *IVPBBOT*, Gen 9:4.

²⁸⁴⁵ Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, 317,

<https://archive.org/stream/geseniushebrewgr00geseuoft#page/316/mode/2up>.

²⁸⁴⁶ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 314.

²⁸⁴⁷ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 193.

²⁸⁴⁸ Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 144.

²⁸⁴⁹ S. David Sperling, “Blood,” *ABD* 1:761–3, 762.

²⁸⁵⁰ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 193.

still had to discard the blood (Lev 7:22–27).²⁸⁵¹

One of the few bans which remained in place for gentiles in the early church consisted of consuming blood (Acts 15:28–29).²⁸⁵² However, the apostles may have left this prohibition in place to avoid offending Jewish followers of Christ.²⁸⁵³ Prior to eating an animal, one had to drain its blood. In effect, this returned the animal's life force to God, the one who created it.²⁸⁵⁴ The Lord demanded that people treat even the carcasses of animals with dignity.²⁸⁵⁵ All life deserves respect, not abuse (Gen 9:9–10; Deut 12:15–18).²⁸⁵⁶

By slaughtering and eating animals in accordance with God's commands, those who ate could recognize his provision for and blessing upon them. This resembles the common practice in our day of thanking the Lord prior to eating a meal.²⁸⁵⁷ No comparable prohibition existed in the ancient extra-biblical world. Therefore, we cannot attribute the ban on consuming blood to Ancient Near Eastern thought. In this regard, Noah and Israel remain unique.²⁸⁵⁸

Read Gen 9:2–4. How was the blessing upon Noah and his sons like that given to Adam and Eve? How did it differ? In what way did their diet change after the flood? Why was consuming blood still off-limits?

Blood for Blood

c) Gen 9:5–7: In the Lord's covenant with Noah, people could shed the blood of an animal for sacrifice or in the process of obtaining food (Gen 8:20–9:4). However, God declared human blood off-limits.²⁸⁵⁹ The Lord said to Noah and his sons, "And surely your blood for your lives I will require. From the hand of every wild animal, I will require it. And from the hand of a person, from the hand of his brother, I will require the life of the person. Whoever pours out the blood of a person, by a person his blood shall be poured out, because in his image God made humanity."

Within this short passage, the Lord mentioned bringing someone to account for taking human life three times (Cf. Ps 9:12).²⁸⁶⁰ He condemned even animals who kill people to death (Exod 21:28–32). Although God had not demanded the life of Cain for killing his brother (Gen 4:8–11), beginning after the flood murderers would pay with their lives.²⁸⁶¹ The Lord made

²⁸⁵¹Sperling, "Blood," *ABD* 1:761.

²⁸⁵²Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 314.

²⁸⁵³Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, 65.

²⁸⁵⁴Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton, *IVPBBCOT*, Gen 9:4.

²⁸⁵⁵Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose*, 64.

²⁸⁵⁶Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 144–5.

²⁸⁵⁷Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton, *IVPBBCOT*, Gen 9:4.

²⁸⁵⁸Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 314.

²⁸⁵⁹Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 145.

²⁸⁶⁰Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 193.

²⁸⁶¹Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 145.

provision for six cities of refuge in Israel for those who accidentally killed another person. Yet, even in such cases, the guilty party could not leave the city safely until the death of the high priest (Num 35:9–34).

The poetic arrangement of Gen 9:6 emphasizes that the punishment must fit the crime (Lev 24:17–22).²⁸⁶² Note the chiasm embedded in this verse:

A Whoever pours out
 B the blood
 C of a person
 Ć by a person
 Ḃ his blood
 Á shall be poured out.²⁸⁶³

Escalations of violence can occur easily (Cf. Gen 4:23–24). In fact, such behavior prompted God to send the flood (Gen 6:1–2, 11–13). The law of retaliation (*lex talionis*) ensured repayment of the guilty party without excessive punishment.²⁸⁶⁴ In the case of murder, the just penalty is death. In ancient Israel, a close relative of the one murdered acted as the executioner.²⁸⁶⁵ However, by the time of the Greco-Roman Empire, the government assumed this function (1 Pet 2:13–14).²⁸⁶⁶

Until recently, many scholars viewed the law of retaliation as a vestige of a barbaric culture.²⁸⁶⁷ According to the Mosaic law, if a person among the elite of society killed his slave, that slave would be avenged (*naqam*) (Exod 21:18–26).

In contrast, the earliest Akkadian law code, the Laws of Eshnunna (ca. 18th century BC), states:

“If a man has no claim against a(nother) man, but (nevertheless) distrains (seizes) the (other) man’s slave-girl, detains the distrainee in his house and causes (her) death, he shall give two slave-girls to the owner of the slave-girl as a replacement. If he has no claim against him, but (nevertheless) distrains the wife of a *muškēnum* (palace official) (or) the child of a *muškēnum* and causes (their) death, it is a capital offense. The distrainer who distrained shall die.”²⁸⁶⁸

In Akkad at that time, the death penalty applied only for offenses against the gods or those associated with royalty.²⁸⁶⁹

Among extant Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) law codes, the 18th century BC Code of Hammurabi first established the law of retribution. Yet even there, the social class of the person

²⁸⁶²Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 193.

²⁸⁶³Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview*, 253.

²⁸⁶⁴H. B. Huffmon, “Lex Talionis,” *ABD* 4:321–2, 321.

²⁸⁶⁵Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton, *IVPBBCOT*, Gen 9:6–17.

²⁸⁶⁶Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 145.

²⁸⁶⁷John E. Hartley, *Leviticus* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1992), 411.

²⁸⁶⁸Albrecht Goetze, trans., “The Laws of Eshnunna,” in *ANET*, 23–4, 162.

https://archive.org/stream/Pritchard1950ANET_20160815/Pritchard_1950_ANET#page/n187/mode/2up.

²⁸⁶⁹Hartley, *Leviticus*, 411.

killed determined the penalty:²⁸⁷⁰

“If a seignior (free man) held (a debt of) grain or money against a(nother) seignior and distrained (someone as) his pledge and the pledge has then died a natural death in the house of his distrainer, that case is not subject to claim. If the pledge has died from beating or abuse in the house of his distrainer, the owner of the pledge shall prove it against his merchant, and if it was the seignior’s son, they shall put his son to death; if it was the seignior’s slave, he shall pay one-third mina [eighteen shekels] of silver and also forfeit everything else that he lent.

“If a seignior struck a(nother) seignior’s daughter and has caused her to have a miscarriage, he shall pay ten shekels of silver for her fetus. If that woman has died, they shall put his daughter to death. If by a blow he has caused a commoner’s daughter to have a miscarriage, he shall pay five shekels of silver. If that woman has died, he shall pay one-half mina [twenty-five shekels] of silver. If he struck a seignior’s female slave and has caused her to have a miscarriage, he shall pay two shekels of silver. If that female slave has died, he shall pay one-third mina [eighteen shekels] of silver.”²⁸⁷¹

Contrary to these ancient law codes, the text in Gen 9:6 indicates that money cannot recompense murder regardless of a person’s social class.²⁸⁷² Nor can someone put the child of a killer to death (Deut 24:16).²⁸⁷³ Consequently, the biblical law of retribution represents an important advancement in the ANE judicial system.²⁸⁷⁴

The Lord decreed the death penalty in the case of murder because, “in the image of God he made humanity” (Gen 1:26–27). Even after the fall, we continue to retain our status as divine image-bearers (Gen 5:1–3).²⁸⁷⁵ A murderer kills someone who resembles God.²⁸⁷⁶ Among believers, this alone should suffice to prevent us from engaging in violent activity.²⁸⁷⁷ No sin exhibits greater disdain for human life than murder.²⁸⁷⁸

This explains why humanity continues to enjoy the unique status which the animal kingdom does not.²⁸⁷⁹ Despite our expulsion from paradise (Gen 3:22–24), sin does not completely mar our likeness to the Lord.²⁸⁸⁰ Nevertheless, we must treat both human and animal life with respect (Gen 9:4; Deut 25:4; Prov 12:10).²⁸⁸¹

Echoing the mandates to the sea creatures and to all the animals (Gen 1:20; Gen 8:17),²⁸⁸² the Lord commanded Noah and his sons, “And you, be fruitful, and multiply, and swarm on the

²⁸⁷⁰Huffmon, “Lex Talionis,” *ABD* 4:321.

²⁸⁷¹Hammurabi, “Code of Hammurabi,” in *ANET*, 209–14, 175,

https://archive.org/stream/Pritchard1950ANET_20160815/Pritchard_1950_ANET#page/n199/mode/2up. A mina was worth 50 shekels.

²⁸⁷²Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 145.

²⁸⁷³Huffmon, “Lex Talionis,” *ABD* 4:321.

²⁸⁷⁴Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land*, 183.

²⁸⁷⁵Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, 64.

²⁸⁷⁶Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, 65.

²⁸⁷⁷Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 315.

²⁸⁷⁸Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 193.

²⁸⁷⁹Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 193–4.

²⁸⁸⁰Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 315.

²⁸⁸¹Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, 64.

²⁸⁸²Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 194.

earth, and multiply on it.” God called Noah and his descendants to produce life, not to wantonly take it.²⁸⁸³

Read Gen 9:5–7. According to the Old Testament, who should suffer the death penalty for killing a person? How does the biblical text differ from other ANE documents in this regard? What sets people apart from animals? How does the Lord regard life?

Live in Peace

2) Rom 12:17–18: In Rom 12:9–16, Paul exhorted his readers to engage with their neighbors in sincere love.²⁸⁸⁴ First, he described how to relate to fellow believers.²⁸⁸⁵ Then, he declared, “Bless the ones persecuting you. Bless and do not curse” (Rom 12:14). In these verses, he expanded upon that directive, addressing how to respond to those who hate us.²⁸⁸⁶ The apostle began this section by writing, “Never evil for evil repay, have regard for what is praiseworthy before all people.”

This may represent a standard formula from the early church (Cf. 1 Thess 5:15; 1 Pet 3:9).²⁸⁸⁷ However, the basis for this teaching occurs in the Old Testament, even though it appears to overturn the law of retaliation (*lex talionis*) (Exod 21:24–25; Exod 23:4–5; Prov 20:22).²⁸⁸⁸ Paul’s statement also reflects the teaching of Jesus (Matt 5:38–48).²⁸⁸⁹

“Have regard for” (*pronoēō*) appears in the present tense. This indicates that believers must continually reflect upon and promote positive attitudes and actions.²⁸⁹⁰ Sensitivity to common decency requires us to willingly behave accordingly (2 Cor 8:18–21).²⁸⁹¹ In contrast to the typical word for “good” (*agathos*), which Paul used in Rom 12:21,²⁸⁹² here the apostle employed a term which reflects moral laudability (*kalos*) (Rom 7:21; Heb 13:18).²⁸⁹³

Since sin affects the ability of people to think righteously, Paul called his readers not to live by the standards of those around us (Rom 1:21).²⁸⁹⁴ Instead, we must conduct ourselves in a manner consistent with what the Lord considers noble (Prov 3:3–7; Matt 5:16; 1 Pet 2:12).²⁸⁹⁵

²⁸⁸³Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 316.

²⁸⁸⁴Moo, *Romans*, 416.

²⁸⁸⁵Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 784.

²⁸⁸⁶Moo, *Romans*, 412.

²⁸⁸⁷Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:645.

²⁸⁸⁸Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 747.

²⁸⁸⁹Moo, *Romans*, 412.

²⁸⁹⁰Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 785. For participles in Koine Greek, the present tense reflects a continuous or repetitive action.

²⁸⁹¹Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 747–8.

²⁸⁹²Arndt, Danker, and Bauer, “ἀγαθός” (*agathos*), *BDAG*, 3–4, 4.

²⁸⁹³Walter Grundmann, “καλός” (*kalos*) *TDNT* 536–50, 549.

²⁸⁹⁴Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:645–6.

²⁸⁹⁵Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 748.

Claiming to know Christ while living disgracefully dishonors him.²⁸⁹⁶

Paul then wrote, “If [it is] possible, as far as it depends on you, with all people live in peace.” Jesus commended peaceful coexistence in a hostile world (Matt 5:9; Mark 9:50).²⁸⁹⁷ Nevertheless, despite our best efforts, people who hate Christ may despise his followers also (Matt 10:16–20; John 15:18–21).

We cannot compromise our faith to gain a peaceful life. When conflict emerges between the moral demands of the Lord and of our neighbors, our allegiance must lie with Christ (Acts 4:18–20; Acts 5:27–29).²⁸⁹⁸ Yet, this never gives us license to conduct ourselves in an offensive manner (1 Pet 3:13–17).²⁸⁹⁹

People living in the Greco-Roman milieu also lauded those who promoted peace.²⁹⁰⁰ The Stoic philosopher Epictetus (55–135 AD) contended this, “A wise and good person neither quarrels with any one himself, nor, as far as possible, suffers another to do so. The life of Socrates affords us an example of this too...since he not only everywhere avoided quarreling himself but did not even suffer others to quarrel.”²⁹⁰¹

Read Rom 12:17–18. Why shouldn’t we return evil for evil? How can we obey Paul’s command to do what is right in everyone’s eyes when people disagree on what is good? Think of an area of conflict you are experiencing. What can you do to live with others in peace?

Leave Vengeance to God

b) Rom 12:19: Paul recognized that sometimes even our best efforts to create a peaceful relationship result in failure (Rom 12:17–18).²⁹⁰² Therefore, he commanded, “Not yourselves taking revenge, beloved, but giving a place for the wrath [of God], as it is written, ‘Mine [is] vengeance. I will repay’ says the Lord.”

Many commentators believe that Paul inserted the word “beloved” (*agapētos*) because he recognized the difficulty of what he exhorted Christians in Rome to do.²⁹⁰³ Nevertheless, those

²⁸⁹⁶Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:646.

²⁸⁹⁷Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 748.

²⁸⁹⁸Moo, *Romans*, 412.

²⁸⁹⁹Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 785–6.

²⁹⁰⁰Keener, *IVPBBNT*, Rom 12:17–8.

²⁹⁰¹Epictetus, “Discourses,” in *The Works of Epictetus: His Discourses, in Four Books, the Enchiridion, and Fragments*, 4.5, 2161–2,

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0237%3Atext%3Ddisc%3Abook%3D4%3Achapter%3D5>.

²⁹⁰²Seifrid, “Romans,” *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 680.

²⁹⁰³Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 786.

who seek vengeance trespass into activity which God reserves for himself.²⁹⁰⁴ When the Lord determines the right time has come, whether in this life or at the last judgment, he shall execute justice (Rom 1:18; Rom 2:5–8; Rom 9:22).²⁹⁰⁵

A major difference exists between the Old Testament (OT) and the New Testament concerning vengeance. The OT limits the injunction against taking revenge to fellow Jewish people (Lev 19:18; 2 Chron 28:8–15; Prov 24:28–29).²⁹⁰⁶ For Christians, knowing what Jesus did for us when we were still his enemies enables us to refrain from taking matters into our own hands (Rom 5:6–9; Luke 6:27–37).²⁹⁰⁷

Paul’s contemporary, the Greco-Roman statesman Seneca (4 BC–65 AD) wrote: “We must, therefore, refrain from anger, whether he who provokes us be on a level with ourselves, or above us, or below us. A contest with one’s equal is of uncertain issue, with one’s superior is folly, and with one’s inferior is contemptible. It is the part of a mean and wretched man to turn and bite one’s biter: even mice and ants show their teeth if you put your hand to them, and all feeble creatures think that they are hurt if they are touched. “It will make us milder tempered to call to mind any services which he with whom we are angry may have done us, and to let his deserts balance his offense. Let us also reflect, how much credit the tale of our forgiveness will confer upon us, how many men may be made into valuable friends by forgiveness...He who refuses to pardon, how often has he begged it for himself? ...If anyone is angry with you, meet his anger by returning benefits for it. A quarrel which is only taken up on one side falls to the ground. It takes two men to fight.”²⁹⁰⁸

Paul grounded his rationale for not taking revenge in the beginning of Deut 32:35,²⁹⁰⁹ where the Hebrew text says, “To me [is] vengeance and recompense.” Evidently, he cited the same Aramaic translation utilized by the author of Heb 10:30.²⁹¹⁰ By preceding the verb translated as “I will repay” (*antapodidōmi*) with the redundant word “I,” this verse emphasizes that the Lord himself will exact justice (2 Sam 22:47–49; Jer 51:55–57; Nah 1:1–3).²⁹¹¹ We must not usurp his authority as the judge of all (Rom 2:1–2).²⁹¹²

Concerning revenge, the Jewish apocryphal work the Testament of Gad (second century BC) says, “And if he be shameless and persist in his wrong-doing, even so forgive him from the heart, and leave to God the avenging.”²⁹¹³

The Essenes of Qumran concurred:

“I will pay to no man the reward of evil. I will pursue him with goodness. For judgement of all

²⁹⁰⁴Moo, *Romans*, 413.

²⁹⁰⁵Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 786–7.

²⁹⁰⁶Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 787.

²⁹⁰⁷Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 648.

²⁹⁰⁸L. Annaeus Seneca, “Of Anger,” in *Minor Dialogs Together with the Dialog “On Clemency”* (trans. Aubrey Stewart; London: George Bell and Sons, 1900), 34, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Of_Anger/Book_II#XXXIV.

²⁹⁰⁹Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:646–7.

²⁹¹⁰Seifrid, “Romans,” *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 680.

²⁹¹¹Keener, *IVPBBNT*, Rom 12:19. Since the ending of a Greek verb includes the first, second or third person, adding a pronoun makes that pronoun emphatic. In this case, the text literally says, “I I will repay.”

²⁹¹²Seifrid, “Romans,” *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 680–1.

²⁹¹³Platt Jr., “The Testament of Gad,” *The Forgotten Books of Eden*, 2:8, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/fbe/fbe290.htm>.

the living is with God and it is he who will render to man his reward...my soul shall not desire the riches of violence. I will not grapple with the men of perdition until the Day of Revenge, but my wrath shall not turn from the men of falsehood, and I will not rejoice until judgment is made.”²⁹¹⁴

Read Rom 12:19. Why does the Lord command us to leave revenge to him? How can you practice that in a situation you currently face?

Responding with Kindness

c) Rom 12:20. Paul exhorted the believers in Rome to meet evil with love and courtesy, rather than seeking to avenge themselves (Rom 12:17–19).²⁹¹⁵ He wrote, “But if hunger the one hating you [has], feed him. If thirst, give him something to drink. For doing this, burning embers you shall heap on his head.” The apostle quoted the Greek translation of Prov 25:21–22.²⁹¹⁶

However, the context of this passage in Romans does not limit our hospitality toward our enemies to giving them food and drink.²⁹¹⁷ It alludes to various acts which express love.²⁹¹⁸ By behaving in such a way, we absolve those who persecute us and do good in the sight of all people (Rom 12:9–17).²⁹¹⁹ Should we fail to do this, we practice retaliation, albeit indirectly.²⁹²⁰

A major controversy over this text has raged for millennia concerning the meaning of the phrase, “burning embers you shall heap on his head.”²⁹²¹ Within the Old Testament, “burning embers” usually refers to God’s judgment upon evil (Ps 18:7–15; Ps 140:9–11; Prov 6:28).²⁹²²

In this homily on this text, John Chrysostom (347–407 AD) compared those who harm others to Cain (Gen 4:1–16):

“He that is wronged, when he is feeble, is not taken so much with any goods of his own as with the vengeance upon the person who has pained him. For there is nothing so sweet as to see an enemy chastised...For if anyone abuses you, he has not hurt you at all, but himself severely. And if again he wrong you, the harm will be with the person who does the wrong.

“Did you never notice that even in the courts of law those who have had wrong done them are honored, and stand and speak out with entire freedom, but those who have done the wrong, are bowed down with shame and fear?... Were he even to whet his sword against you, and to stain

²⁹¹⁴Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 1QS 10:17–8, 85, https://archive.org/stream/pdfy-Uy_BZ_QGsaLiJ4Zs/The%20Dead%20Sea%20Scrolls%20%5BComplete%20English%20Translation%5D#page/n145/mode/2up.

²⁹¹⁵Moo, *Romans*, 417.

²⁹¹⁶Randall Tan, David A. DeSilva, and Isaiah Hoogendyk, eds., *The Lexham Greek-English Interlinear Septuagint: H.B. Swete Edition* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008–12), Prov 25:21–2.

²⁹¹⁷Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:648.

²⁹¹⁸Seifrid, “Romans,” *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 681.

²⁹¹⁹Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 788.

²⁹²⁰Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:648.

²⁹²¹Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 750.

²⁹²²Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 788.

his right hand in your life-blood, it is not you that he has done any harm to, but himself that he has butchered...[Consider him] who was first taken off thus by a brother's hand. For he went away to the haven...having gained a glory that dies not away; but the other lived a life worse than any death, groaning, and trembling, and in his body bearing about the accusation of what he had done."²⁹²³

However, Chrysostom's view of the Lord executing greater revenge than we can does not mesh with Paul's concern about loving our enemies.²⁹²⁴ We cannot seek greater harm for our enemies by refraining from taking matters into our own hands and consider that "overcoming evil" (Rom 12:21).²⁹²⁵

Consequently, Augustine (354–430) wrote, "The coals of fire are the burning lamentations of repentance by which that man's pride is healed and he grieves that he has been an enemy of the man who relieves his misery."²⁹²⁶ Most modern commentators concur with Augustine.²⁹²⁷ By meeting the contempt of our enemies with kindness, they may experience shame for their behavior and then seek to learn why we chose to respond to them with love.²⁹²⁸

The concept of carrying coals of fire on one's head as a sign of repentance appears to originate from an ancient Egyptian practice for exonerating the guilt of one's sins.²⁹²⁹ According to a text which describes the aftermath of the theft of a book of magic spells:²⁹³⁰ "Pharaoh said, 'Setne, I did what I could for thee before, saying, "They will slay thee if thou take not this book to the place whence thou broughtest it," and until this time thou gavest no heed. Let this book be taken to [its owner], a fork and stick in thine hand, and a censer of fire on thine head.' Setne came out from the presence of Pharaoh, a fork and stick in his hand, a censer of fire on his head."²⁹³¹

Only truly contrite people willingly carry a censer of burning coals on their heads, especially when holding other objects with both hands. In the Aramaic paraphrase of Prov 25:21–22, some added words make the context clear. The rabbis wrote, "Yahweh will hand him over to thee" or "Yahweh will make him thy friend." They viewed the heaping of coals as a method to convert one's enemy into an ally.²⁹³² Similarly, the Babylonian Talmud states, "The

²⁹²³John Chrysostom, *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans*, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (NPNFI-11)* (ed. Philip Schaff; trans. J. B. Morris and W. H. Simcox, revised by George B. Stevens; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1889), Homily 22, 923–4, https://archive.org/stream/HomiliesOnTheActsOfTheApostlesAndTheEpistleToTheRomans/11_chrysostom_john_saint_d407_homilies_on_the_acts_of_the_apostles#page/n921/mode/2up.

²⁹²⁴Moo, *Romans*, 413.

²⁹²⁵Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:648–9, note 1.

²⁹²⁶Augustine, *Saint Augustine: Christian Instruction; Admonition and Grace; The Christian Combat; Faith, Hope and Charity* (ed. Robert P. Russell, John Courtney Murray, and Bernard M. Peebles; trans. John J. Gavigan; The Fathers of the Church; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1950), 136.

²⁹²⁷Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:649.

²⁹²⁸Moo, *Romans*, 413.

²⁹²⁹Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:650.

²⁹³⁰Lise Manniche, *Sexual Life in Ancient Egypt* (London: Routledge, 2004), 64.

²⁹³¹F. L. L. Griffith, trans., *Stories of the High Priests of Memphis: The Dethon of Herodotus and the Demotic Tales of Khamaus* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1900), 38,

<https://archive.org/stream/storiesofhighpri00grifuoft#page/n38/mode/2up>.

²⁹³²Friedrich Lang, "σῶρευω" (*sōreuō*), *TDNT* 7:1094–6, 1095, note 5.

Lord...will cause it to be at peace with thee.”²⁹³³ Consequently, Paul’s citation of this proverb most likely created positive connotations for his original audience.²⁹³⁴

In fact, the apostle went even farther than prohibiting revenge. When others bring us harm, the Lord calls to respond with kindness, moving them toward repentance. Even if our efforts fail and our enemies intensify their animosity,²⁹³⁵ we can emerge from the fray with a clear conscience. Our greatest example to emulate is Christ himself (1 Pet 2:21–24).²⁹³⁶

Read Rom 12:20. Why would Paul include the proverb about heaping burning coals on someone’s head after urging his readers to avoid taking revenge? What practical implication does this have for you?

Overcoming Evil with Good

d) Rom 12:21: Paul summed up this section of his letter (Rom 12:14–21) in this verse.²⁹³⁷ He wrote, “Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.” The apostle used the present tense to indicate that we must consciously and persistently strive to achieve this goal.²⁹³⁸

As we can see in novels, movies, and even on the road, a desire for revenge remains deeply embedded in human nature.²⁹³⁹ When we choose to avenge ourselves, the evils done to us and those which emanate from our own hearts emerge as the victors. We become like the one opposing us.²⁹⁴⁰ Such behavior fails to reflect that God has transformed our hearts and minds into the image of Christ (Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 2:14–16; 1 Pet 2:21–25).²⁹⁴¹

Paul calls us to do more than merely abstain from evil. Instead, we must actively pursue doing good.²⁹⁴² By treating our enemies with kindness, they may respond by becoming our friends and allies.²⁹⁴³ Even in our era, jailers of persecuted Christians come to Christ due to the demeanor of their captives.²⁹⁴⁴

Many believers in Rome recognized this concept.²⁹⁴⁵ In addition to Paul’s previous quote from Prov 25:21–22, the apocryphal Testament of Benjamin (second century BC) states, “And do ye, my children, flee evil-doing, envy, and hatred of brethren, and cleave to goodness and

²⁹³³b. Sukkah 52a, <http://halakhah.com/pdf/moed/Sukkah.pdf>.

²⁹³⁴Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 751.

²⁹³⁵Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 789.

²⁹³⁶Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 751.

²⁹³⁷Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:650.

²⁹³⁸Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 751. In Koine Greek, a present tense command indicates continuous or repetitive action.

²⁹³⁹Moo, *Romans*, 417.

²⁹⁴⁰Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:650.

²⁹⁴¹Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 789.

²⁹⁴²Moo, *Romans*, 417.

²⁹⁴³Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:650.

²⁹⁴⁴Open Doors, “Iranian Jailer Transformed Because of Faithful Prisoner,”

<https://www.opendoorsusa.org/takeaction/pray/tag-prayer-updates-post/iranian-jailor-transformed-because-of-faithful-prisoner/>.

²⁹⁴⁵Keener, *IVPBBCNT*, Rom 12:21.

love.”²⁹⁴⁶ The Testament of Joseph goes farther, saying, “And if anyone seeketh to do evil unto you, do well unto him, and pray for him, and ye shall be redeemed of the Lord from all evil.”²⁹⁴⁷

Furthermore, Polyaeus, a second century AD Greco-Roman historian, recounted this event from the third century BC Punic Wars:

“Hamilcar, one of the ablest generals that the Carthaginians ever had, was in command of their forces in Africa. But after a series of great successes, he was opposed by a faction, who were jealous of his reputation, and they charged him with planning to undermine the liberties of the people. Through their influence, he was condemned, and executed; and his brother Gesco was banished. New generals were then appointed; but under their command, the Carthaginian armies met with nothing but repeated defeats, until their very survival became a matter of doubt. In these difficulties, what could they do? They could not raise Hamilcar from his tomb.

“They therefore sent a contrite letter to Gesco, recalling him from exile and appointing him to be general of their armies. They promised to hand over to him his own, and his brother's enemies, for him to punish as he wished. Gesco, on his return to his country, ordered his enemies to be brought before him in chains. He ordered them to lie down upon their bellies on the ground, and he thrice put his foot lightly upon their necks. Then he said that, by this humiliation, he had taken sufficient revenge on them for his brother's death. After this, he dismissed them, adding, ‘I will not return evil with evil, but repay evil with good.’

“This conduct won Gesco the favor and ready obedience of all parties, both of friends and enemies; as someone who was both amiable and great. And he soon brought them success in their public affairs; he conquered the enemy by his courage, and he gained the support of the vanquished by the sweetness of his nature.”²⁹⁴⁸

Despite the traditional nature of Paul’s admonition to overcome evil with good, he recognized that the presence of the Holy Spirit must enable believers to reach this ideal (Rom 5:3–5).²⁹⁴⁹

However, even Christ—who perfectly overcame the world—did not see all his enemies become friends (John 16:33).²⁹⁵⁰ We have no guarantee that loving others will result in a positive response from them.²⁹⁵¹ Although people may continue to hate us, we can refuse to consider them enemies in our own hearts and minds.²⁹⁵² Love requires service, sacrifice, forgiveness, and seeking restoration to fellowship with us and with the Lord (Rom 12:9–13).²⁹⁵³ It consists of an attitude which God commands us to adopt, rather than an emotion. By cooperating with the

²⁹⁴⁶Rutherford H. Jr. Platt, “The Testament of Benjamin,” in *The Forgotten Books of Eden* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926), 4.3. At <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/fbe/fbe295.htm>, the reference appears in 2.1.

²⁹⁴⁷Rutherford H. Platt Jr., trans., “The Testament of Joseph,” in *The Forgotten Books of Eden* (New York: Alpha House, 1926), 18.2. At <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/fbe/fbe293.htm>, the reference is 2:68.

²⁹⁴⁸Polyaeus, “Polyaeus: Stratagems - Book 5, Chapters 1–15,” 5.11,

<http://www.attalus.org/translate/polyaeus5A.html#11.1>. Adapted from the 1793 translation by R. Shepherd.

²⁹⁴⁹Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 752.

²⁹⁵⁰Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:650.

²⁹⁵¹Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 756.

²⁹⁵²Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:650.

²⁹⁵³Gerhard Kittel, “ἀγάπη” (*agapē*) *TDNT* 1:21–55, 51.

Spirit so that we live in love,²⁹⁵⁴ we demonstrate the reality of the transforming power of the gospel even to those who hate us.²⁹⁵⁵

Read Rom 12:21. How can you overcome evil? What practical steps can you take to love others well?

Submitting to Governing Authorities

f) Rom 13:1: This verse and the ones which follow it segue from the avoidance of personal vengeance to proper relationships with government officials (Rom 12:14–13:7). Since the believers in Rome lived in the capital of the empire, this topic resonated with them.²⁹⁵⁶ Peter wrote similar admonitions to Christians in Asia Minor (1 Pet 2:13–17).²⁹⁵⁷ Therefore, Paul likely derived his commands from traditional material within the early church.²⁹⁵⁸

In the preceding section of this letter, Paul exhorted his readers not to take revenge but to leave judgment to God (Rom 12:17–21).²⁹⁵⁹ One can imagine the questions arising from that teaching: “Does God allow those who commit evil to continue in their wicked ways as long as they live?” “Must we overlook serious offenses against us, our families, and others?”²⁹⁶⁰

Paul previously informed them that corruption taints everything in this world until the arrival of a new creation (Rom 8:20–21).²⁹⁶¹ This caused them to question whether God expects people who live in anticipation of the age to come to reject every aspect of secular society, such as human government.²⁹⁶²

The apostle affirmed the role of political regimes by writing, “Every person to governing authorities must be submissive.” By placing “every person” first in the sentence, Paul emphasized that this mandate applies to all people.²⁹⁶³ In the New Testament (NT), when “authority” (*exousia*) pertains to someone bearing power, it can have two different connotations.²⁹⁶⁴ The word can refer either to human government and officials or to the transcendent rulers of the spiritual realm.²⁹⁶⁵

In the past, some commentators asserted that this term applies to angelic powers which operate through people.²⁹⁶⁶ However, that view encounters several difficulties. Typically, when

²⁹⁵⁴Moo, *Romans*, 416.

²⁹⁵⁵Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:650.

²⁹⁵⁶Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 759.

²⁹⁵⁷Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 793.

²⁹⁵⁸Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 759.

²⁹⁵⁹Moo, *Romans*, 421.

²⁹⁶⁰Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 792.

²⁹⁶¹Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 791.

²⁹⁶²Seifrid, “Romans,” *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 681.

²⁹⁶³Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:656. In Koine Greek, authors placed what they wished to emphasize at the beginning of a sentence or clause.

²⁹⁶⁴Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 795.

²⁹⁶⁵Werner Foerster, “ἐξουσία” (*exousia*), *TDNT*, 1:560–75, 571.

²⁹⁶⁶Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 760.

“authorities” means spiritual forces, the term occurs in conjunction with “dominions” (*kuriotēs*), “powers” (*dynamis*), or “rulers” (*archē*).²⁹⁶⁷ The modifier “governing” strengthens this case,²⁹⁶⁸ as *hyperechō* applies only to people in power over or more important than someone else (Cf. 1 Pet 2:13 and the Greek translation of Gen 25:23).²⁹⁶⁹

Although Paul referred to a word related to “rulers” (*archon*) in Rom 13:3, he wrote about human leaders in that verse.²⁹⁷⁰ Consequently, even scholars who once held the supernatural view, such as Cranfield, now recognize that Paul likely referred strictly to civil government in this passage.²⁹⁷¹ These authorities range from local bureaucrats to the highest human rulers in the land.²⁹⁷²

Notably, Paul called his readers to submit (*hypotassō*) to governing authorities. This word carries a slightly different nuance than “to obey” (*peitharcheō*).²⁹⁷³ In the NT, “to submit” incorporates a wide range of meaning.²⁹⁷⁴ Here it consists of voluntary subjection of oneself to another person, accompanied by the respect appropriate for someone of higher rank.²⁹⁷⁵ Paul calls us to recognize that we stand under our civil rulers and to live accordingly.²⁹⁷⁶

Elsewhere in the NT, “to submit” consists of a willingness to renounce one’s own desires in deference to another person.²⁹⁷⁷ This attitude should exist between all people (Eph 5:18–25; Luke 2:51; 1 Pet 5:1–5). Humility necessarily precedes submission (Phil 2:3).²⁹⁷⁸ As Eph 5:21 clarifies, both parties share mutual responsibilities.²⁹⁷⁹

Regarding that verse, John Calvin wrote:

“God has bound us so strongly to each other that no man ought to endeavor to avoid subjection; and where love reigns, mutual services will be rendered. I do not except even kings and governors, whose very authority is held for the *service* of the community. It is highly proper that all should be exhorted to be subject to each other in their turn. But as nothing is more irksome to the mind of man than this mutual subjection, he directs us to *the fear of Christ*, who alone can subdue our fierceness, that we may not refuse the yoke, and can humble our pride, that we may not be ashamed of serving our neighbors.”²⁹⁸⁰

Even kings must understand that God calls them to submit themselves to the needs of their subjects (2 Ki 21:16; 2 Ki 24:1–4).²⁹⁸¹ Paul wrote to people living under an authoritarian

²⁹⁶⁷ Arndt, Danker, and Bauer, “ἐξουσία” (*exousia*), *BDAG*, 352–3, 353.

²⁹⁶⁸ Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 760.

²⁹⁶⁹ Arndt, Danker, and Bauer, “ὑπερέχω” (*hyperechō*), *BDAG*, 1033.

²⁹⁷⁰ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 795–6.

²⁹⁷¹ Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:656, 659–60.

²⁹⁷² Moo, *Romans*, 421.

²⁹⁷³ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 797. Cranfield notes that Paul did not choose any of the three NT words meaning “to obey” here (2:660).

²⁹⁷⁴ Gerhard Delling, “ὑποτάσσω” (*hypotassō*), *TDNT*, 8:39–46.

²⁹⁷⁵ Arndt, Danker, and Bauer, “ὑποτάσσω” (*hypotassō*), *BDAG*, 1042.

²⁹⁷⁶ Moo, *Romans*, 422.

²⁹⁷⁷ Delling, “ὑποτάσσω” (*hypotassō*), *TDNT* 8:45.

²⁹⁷⁸ Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 761.

²⁹⁷⁹ Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:661.

²⁹⁸⁰ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesian* (trans. William Pringle; Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 316–7. Italics original.

²⁹⁸¹ Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:662.

government, unlike many of us. Nevertheless, he expected his readers to treat civil authorities with respect, to pay taxes, and to pray for them (Rom 13:6–7; 1 Tim 2:1–4).²⁹⁸²

Typically, this also involves obeying our rulers.²⁹⁸³ As long as we live in this era of the now and not yet, God calls us to abide by the political institutions of our nations.²⁹⁸⁴ As with all other relationships, human laws may conflict with the ordinances of God.²⁹⁸⁵ When that occurs, our submission to the Lord takes precedence (Matt 22:15–22; Acts 4:18–31; Acts 5:26–29).²⁹⁸⁶

Not until Paul’s lifetime did Roman emperors adopt the title “Lord” for themselves. The earliest known example of this refers to Claudius.²⁹⁸⁷ That papyrus, dated to 49 AD 699), calls him “Tiberius Claudius Caesar, our Lord.”²⁹⁸⁸ This put early Christians on a collision course with the Roman adoption of emperor worship.²⁹⁸⁹ The refusal of Jesus’s followers to worship Roman gods and their efforts to convince others to abandon burning incense to the emperor led to their persecution as atheists.²⁹⁹⁰ Eventually, Roman authorities declared such behavior a crime worthy of death.²⁹⁹¹ Although Roman rulers did not require making sacrifices to the emperor in the apostles’ lifetimes, both Peter and Paul died for their faith under Nero (reigned 54–68 AD).

The church historian Eusebius (ca. 275–339) wrote:

“When the government of Nero was now firmly established, he began to plunge into unholy pursuits, and armed himself even against the religion of the God of the universe...He was the first of the emperors who showed himself an enemy of the divine religion.”

“The Roman Tertullian [ca. 155–220] is likewise a witness of this. He writes as follows, ‘Examine your records. There you will find that Nero was the first that persecuted this doctrine, particularly when after subduing all the east, he exercised his cruelty against all at Rome. We glory in having such a man the leader in our punishment. For whoever knows him can understand that nothing was condemned by Nero unless it was something of great excellence. Thus, publicly announcing himself as the first among God’s chief enemies, he was led on to the slaughter of the apostles. It is, therefore, recorded that Paul was beheaded in Rome itself, and that Peter likewise was crucified under Nero. This account of Peter and Paul is substantiated by the fact that their names are preserved in the cemeteries of that place even to the present day.’”²⁹⁹²

When Paul wrote to the Romans (ca. 57 AD), Nero had not yet begun his persecution of

²⁹⁸²Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:662.

²⁹⁸³Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 797.

²⁹⁸⁴Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 760.

²⁹⁸⁵Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:662.

²⁹⁸⁶Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 797.

²⁹⁸⁷Werner Foerster, “κύριος” (*kurios*), *TDNT* 3:1039–98, 1054.

²⁹⁸⁸Duke Databank of Documentary Papyri, “Report of a Lawsuit (P.Oxy. 1 37),” <http://aquila.zaw.uni-heidelberg.de/hgv/20699>.

²⁹⁸⁹Henry Fairfield Burton, “The Worship of the Roman Emperors,” *The Biblical World* 40, no. 2 (1 August 1912):80–91, 90, http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3141986.pdf?_id=1471457695856.

²⁹⁹⁰Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language, 3rd Ed.*, 38.

²⁹⁹¹Burton, “The Worship of the Roman Emperors,” 90, http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3141986.pdf?_id=1471457695856.

²⁹⁹²Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* (ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace; vol. 1 of *Church History, Life of Constantine, Oration in Praise of Constantine*; Edinburgh; London; New York: T & T Clark, 1890), 25:1, 3–5, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iii.vii.xxvi.html>.

Christians. This may account for the lack of exceptions in his letter.²⁹⁹³

The apostle then cited the reason for our submission to governing authorities, writing, “For there is no authority except by God, and those which exist are by God put in place.” This concept of the Lord granting power to human rulers reflects Old Testament teaching (2 Sam 12:7). God planned Judah’s exile to Babylon and the nation’s release (Jer 29:4–7; Isa 44:28; 2 Chron 36:22–23).²⁹⁹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar II finally grasped this truth after God disciplined him (Dan 4:17, 28–37).²⁹⁹⁵ However, his successor Belshazzar failed to learn this lesson, and the Lord permanently removed him from office (Dan 5:1–5, 25–30).²⁹⁹⁶

Paul left no room for doubt: ultimately the Lord sets all political leaders in their places.²⁹⁹⁷ No one, even an ungodly ruler, can exercise authority unless the Lord grants it (Isa 44:28–45:7).²⁹⁹⁸ Yet, this truth does not exempt political leaders from God’s judgment when they abuse the offices he granted to them.²⁹⁹⁹ The Lord holds all rulers accountable for their actions.³⁰⁰⁰ Evil people will reject those who suffer for a just cause.³⁰⁰¹ Consequently, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “If we fall into human hands, if we suffer and die by human violence, we may be sure that everything comes from God...Therefore, ‘Be not afraid!’”³⁰⁰²

By not being overcome by evil but overcoming evil with good (Rom 12:21), Christians bear testimony to this lost world that God has begun his new creation in the church community (Rom 8:15–30).³⁰⁰³ Where this world and the body of Christ clash, political rulers either wisely withdraw or resort to violence. When brutality occurs, suffering believers need the full support of the world-wide church (Rom 8:31–39; Heb 13:1–3).³⁰⁰⁴

During the Nazi era, Bonhoeffer made this statement:

“The church was mute when it should have cried out, because the blood of the innocent cried out to heaven. The church did not...resist to the death the falling away from faith and is guilty of the godlessness of the masses...The church confesses that it has misused the name of Christ by being ashamed of it before the world and by not resisting strongly enough the misuse of that name for evil ends. The church has looked on while injustice and violence have been done... “The church confesses that it has witnessed the arbitrary use of brutal force, the suffering in body and soul of countless innocent people, that it has witnessed oppression, hatred, and murder without raising its voice for the victims and without finding ways of rushing to help them...The church confesses that it has looked on silently as the poor were exploited and robbed...The church confesses its guilt toward the countless people whose lives have been destroyed by slander, denunciation, and defamation... The church confesses that it has coveted security,

²⁹⁹³Keener, *IVPBBCNT*, Rom 13:1–2.

²⁹⁹⁴Seifrid, “Romans,” *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 681.

²⁹⁹⁵Moo, *Romans*, 422.

²⁹⁹⁶Seifrid, “Romans,” *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 681.

²⁹⁹⁷Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 798.

²⁹⁹⁸Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:663.

²⁹⁹⁹Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 761–2.

³⁰⁰⁰Seifrid, “Romans,” *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 681–2.

³⁰⁰¹Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 109.

³⁰⁰²Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 197.

³⁰⁰³Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 243–4.

³⁰⁰⁴Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 245–6.

tranquility, peace, property, and honor to which it had no claim...The church confesses itself guilty of violating all the Ten Commandments. It confesses thereby its apostasy from Christ.”³⁰⁰⁵ Bonhoeffer provides a strong reminder that God calls all believers to protect those who cannot help themselves when they face injustice (Jer 22:3–4; Ezek 12:19; Ezek 33:7–9; Mic 6:6–16).

Read Rom 13:1. How do we know that Paul had human authorities in mind rather than angelic ones? Why must we submit to such rulers? How must we respond when the edicts of government authorities directly contradict those of the Lord?

Engaging in Anarchy

g) Rom 13:2: Since the Lord places all political leaders in office (Rom 13:1), Paul wrote, “Therefore, whoever resists (*antitassō*) authority has opposed the ordinance of God, and the ones who have set themselves against (*anthistēmi*) [it] upon themselves judgment shall receive.” The compound word *antitassō* literally means “against order,”³⁰⁰⁶ signaling strong opposition to something or someone (Cf. the Greek translation of Prov 3:34).

According to the 1st–2nd century AD Testament of Dan:

“I know that in the last days, ye shall depart from the Lord, and ye shall provoke Levi unto anger, and fight against (*antitassō*) Judah; but ye shall not prevail against them, for an Angel of the Lord shall guide them both; for by them shall Israel stand.”³⁰⁰⁷

In the New Testament, the very rare word translated as “ordinance” (*diatagē*) occurs only here and in Acts 7:53.³⁰⁰⁸ However, Paul did use a related verb in Gal 3:19.³⁰⁰⁹ Refusing to recognize the legitimate right of human governments to wield authority equates to rebelling against the Lord (Matt 22:15–22; Rom 13:6–7).³⁰¹⁰ Acts 25:7–12 recounts Paul’s approach to ruling regimes.

“Judgment” (*krima*) refers to the decision of a judge, with the ruling typically going against the one under trial. This results in condemnation (Mark 12:38–40; Acts 24:24–25; 1 Cor 11:27–34).³⁰¹¹ Consequently, the Jewish expression “judgment shall receive” forms an idiom meaning “shall be condemned.”³⁰¹² Due to the context of this passage, this judgment will come

³⁰⁰⁵Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Clifford J. Green, ed., Reinhard Krauss, et al., *Ethics* (DBW; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005), 138–41.

³⁰⁰⁶Gerhard Delling, “τάσσω” (*tassō*), *TDNT*, 8:27–31.

³⁰⁰⁷R. H. Charles, trans., “Testament of Dan,” in *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (London: Black, 1908), 128, <https://archive.org/stream/testamentsoftwel08char#page/128/mode/2up>.

³⁰⁰⁸Result of Logos 7 word study on “διαταγή” (*diatagē*).

³⁰⁰⁹Arndt, Danker, and Bauer, “διαταγή” (*diatagē*), *BDAG*, 237.

³⁰¹⁰Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 799.

³⁰¹¹Friedrich Büchsel, “κρίμα” (*krima*), *TDNT* 3:942.

³⁰¹²Arndt, Danker, and Bauer, “κρίμα” (*krima*), *BDAG*, 567.

from God, not merely from the civil authorities.³⁰¹³ Those who engage in anarchy,³⁰¹⁴ persistently rebelling against human rulers, subject themselves to God’s wrath at the final judgment. They await certain condemnation.³⁰¹⁵

This concept of allegiance to one’s government commonly appeared in the Greco-Roman world.³⁰¹⁶ The second century AD Stoic author Hierocles wrote an entire work on the subject called *How to Behave Toward One’s Fatherland*.³⁰¹⁷

According to Plato (427–327 BC), when a friend offered to help Socrates escape from prison to avoid his execution, the condemned man said this:³⁰¹⁸ “Then consider whether, if we go away from here without the consent of the state, we are doing harm to the very ones to whom we least ought to do harm...and whether we are abiding by what we agreed was right...If, as I was on the point of running away (or whatever it should be called), the laws and the commonwealth should come to me and ask, ‘Tell me, Socrates, what have you in mind to do? Are you not intending by this thing you are trying to do, to destroy us, the laws, and the entire state?’...Or do you think that state can exist and not be overturned, in which the decisions by the courts have no force but are made invalid and annulled by persons?”³⁰¹⁹

Thus, Socrates endured the death penalty to avoid sabotaging the government. He recognized that civil authorities enacted good laws in addition to bad legislation.³⁰²⁰

Read Rom 13:2. How does refusing to obey governing authorities relate to rebelling against God? What hints do we have in this verse that anarchists will face the Lord’s judgment? How do you respond when the ordinances of human rulers contradict those of God? Does that amount to rebellion? Why or why not?

Do What is Good

h) Rom 13:3: Paul continued his theme of the origin and purpose of human government (Rom 13:1–2).³⁰²¹ He wrote, “For rulers are not a cause for fear for good behavior but for evil. Do you

³⁰¹³Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:664.

³⁰¹⁴Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 762.

³⁰¹⁵Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 799.

³⁰¹⁶Keener, *IVPBBCNT*, Rom 13:1–7.

³⁰¹⁷Keener, *IVPBBCNT*, Rom 13:1–7.

³⁰¹⁸Keener, *IVPBBCNT*, Rom 13:1–7.

³⁰¹⁹Plato, “Crito,” in *Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vol. 1* (trans. Harold North Fowler; Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press; William Heinemann, 1966), 49e–50c,

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0170%3Atext%3DCrito%3Asection%3D49e>.

³⁰²⁰Keener, *IVPBBCNT*, Rom 13:1–7.

³⁰²¹Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 763.

want not to be afraid of the authority?”

In AD 49, the emperor Claudius expelled all Jewish people from Rome.³⁰²² Suetonius (ca. 69–130/140), a Roman historian, wrote, “He banished from Rome all the Jews, who were continually making disturbances at the instigation of one Chrestus.”³⁰²³ Most likely, this refers to the preaching of the gospel by Jewish believers.³⁰²⁴

As a result, the church became composed entirely of Gentiles until the automatic repeal of the edict upon Claudius’s death in AD 54 (Cf. Acts 18:2; Rom 16:3).³⁰²⁵ Paul appears to have written his letter within five years after the exile ended.³⁰²⁶ By belonging to a foreign religion, Roman authorities considered Christians subversive to the social order.³⁰²⁷ Therefore, Paul called his readers to practice good citizenship. Morally laudable behavior not only frees us from fear of punishment, it brings us approval from secular leaders.³⁰²⁸

For example, in Greco-Roman households, no one held men and slave owners accountable for their treatment of women and slaves.³⁰²⁹ This was not the case in Christian homes, which rejected the complete subordination of women to their husbands and cruelty toward slaves (Eph 5:25–33; Eph 6:9; 1 Pet 3:7–9).³⁰³⁰ As a result, Christian women and slaves received more freedom and power than their non-Christian friends enjoyed.³⁰³¹

In the early church, Christianity spread faster among women than among men. After all, males had more to lose in terms of their social status by converting to a despised minority religion. The discrepancy in numbers was so great that Celsus, a 2nd century AD philosopher, complained, “[Christians] desire and are able to gain over only the silly, and the mean, and the stupid, with women and children.”³⁰³²

The obedience expected of wives in Greco-Roman antiquity included allegiance to their husbands’ religions,³⁰³³ as Plutarch (46–122 AD) wrote in *Advice to a Bride and Groom*: “A wife ought not to make friends of her own, but to enjoy her husband’s friends in common with him. The gods are the first and most important friends. Wherefore it is becoming for a wife to worship and to know only the gods that her husband believes in, and to shut the front door

³⁰²² James D. G. Dunn, “Romans, Letter to the,” *DPL*, 838–50, 839.

³⁰²³ C. Tranquillus Suetonius, “Divus Claudius,” in *Suetonius: The Lives of the Twelve Caesars; an English Translation, Augmented with the Biographies of Contemporary Statesmen, Orators, Poets, and Other Associates* (ed. J. Eugene Reed; trans. Alexander Thomson; Philadelphia: Gebbie, 1889), 25.4. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0132%3A1ife%3Dcl.%3Achapter%3D25>.

³⁰²⁴ Dunn, “Romans, Letter to the,” *DPL*, 852–3.

³⁰²⁵ F. F. Bruce, “Christianity Under Claudius,” *BJRL* 44, no. 2 (1 March 1962): 309–26, 318, https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/bjrl/claudius_bruce.pdf.

³⁰²⁶ Kruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, 13.

³⁰²⁷ Keener, *IVPBBCNT*, Rom 13:1–7.

³⁰²⁸ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 800.

³⁰²⁹ David L. Balch, “Early Christian Criticism of Patriarchal Authority: 1 Peter 2:11–3:12,” *USQR* 39, no. 3, January 1, 1984: 161–73, 166.

³⁰³⁰ David L. Balch, “Household Codes,” *ABD* 3:318–20, 319.

³⁰³¹ Balch, “Early Christian Criticism of Patriarchal Authority 1 Peter 2:11–3:12,” 169.

³⁰³² Origen, Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, trans., *Against Celsus* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885), 3.44, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/origen163.html>.

³⁰³³ Keener, *IVPBBCNT*, 1 Pet 3:1.

tight upon all queer rituals and outlandish superstitions. For with no god do stealthy and secret rites performed by a woman find any favor.³⁰³⁴

People in Greco-Roman society regarded most Christian women as highly insubordinate solely by their religious commitment.³⁰³⁵ Only by leading exemplary lives could believers counter the appearance of undermining the social order.³⁰³⁶

Aristotle's 4th century BC view on government and household rule remained in effect in Paul's era:³⁰³⁷

“Under each of these forms of government we find friendship existing between ruler and ruled, to the same extent as justice. The friendship of a king for his subjects is one of superiority in beneficence; for a king does good to his subjects, inasmuch as being good he studies to promote their welfare, as a shepherd studies the welfare of his sheep...

“The friendship between husband and wife again is the same as that which prevails between rulers and subjects in an aristocracy; for it is in proportion to excellence, and the better party receives the larger share [of good], whilst each party receives what is appropriate to each... There is little or no friendship between ruler and subjects in a tyranny. For where there is nothing in common between ruler and ruled, there can be no friendship between them either, any more than there can be justice. It is like the relation between a craftsman and his tool...

“All these instruments it is true are benefited by the persons who use them, but there can be no friendship, nor justice, towards inanimate things; indeed not even towards a horse or an ox, nor yet towards a slave as slave. For master and slave have nothing in common: a slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave. Therefore, there can be no friendship with a slave as slave, though there can be as human being: for there seems to be some room for justice in the relations of every human being with every other that is capable of participating in law and contract, and hence friendship also is possible with everyone so far as he is a human being. Hence even in tyrannies there is but little scope for friendship and justice between ruler and subjects; but there is most room for them in democracies, where the citizens being equal have many things in common.”³⁰³⁸

Under the best of circumstances, Aristotle compared a king's subjects, women, and slaves to a farmer's animals in relation to those who ruled over them.

When considering authority figures, Paul advised, “Do good and you will have approval from them.” This aligned with typical Greek philosophy.³⁰³⁹

Diodorus Siculus, a first century BC historian, wrote:

“Throughout our entire treatise our practice has been to employ the customary freedom of speech enjoyed by history, and we have added just praise of good men for their fair deeds and meted out just censure upon bad men whenever they did wrong. By this means...we shall lead men whose

³⁰³⁴Plutarch, *Advice to a Bride and Groom (Conjugal Praecepta)*, 19,

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2008.01.0181%3Asection%3D19>.

³⁰³⁵Balch, “Early Christian Criticism of Patriarchal Authority: 1 Peter 2:11–3:12,” 166.

³⁰³⁶Keener, *IVPBBNT*, Rom 13:1–7.

³⁰³⁷Cohick, *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians*, 67.

³⁰³⁸Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (trans. H. Rackham; Aristotle in 23 Volumes; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), 8.11.1–7,

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0054:book=8:chapter=11&highlight=tyranny>.

³⁰³⁹Herbert Preisker, “ἐπαινος” (*epainos*), *TDNT* 2:586–8, 586.

nature fortunately inclines them to virtue undertake, because of the immortality fame accords them, the fairest deeds, whereas by appropriate [criticisms] we shall turn men of the opposite character from their impulse to evil.³⁰⁴⁰

Claiming to know Christ while living disgracefully dishonors him.³⁰⁴¹ Paul exhorted his readers to live for the glory of God in a world of sinful people.

Read Rom 13:3. Why did Greco-Romans consider Christians subversive? How did Paul seek to allay that tension? What do good governments do?

Bearing the Sword

i) Rom 13:4: Ultimately, Paul grounded his rationale for behaving laudably in theology, rather than for personal benefit (Cf. Rom 13:1–3). Concerning each civil ruler, he wrote, “For a servant (*diakonos*) of God he is to you for good. But if evil you are doing, be afraid.”

In the New Testament, a “servant of God” typically refers to someone in leadership in the church (Col 1:7; 1 Tim 4:6).³⁰⁴² Paul utilized this word to refer to the office of a deacon (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8–13; Rom 16:1).³⁰⁴³ However, in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (OT), the term applies to civic leaders and royal officials (Esth 2:1–2).³⁰⁴⁴

A Jewish apocryphal work exhorted:

“Listen therefore, O kings, and understand; learn, O judges of the ends of the earth. Give ear, you that rule over multitudes, and boast of many nations. For your dominion was given you from the Lord, and your sovereignty from the Most High; he will search out your works and inquire into your plans. Because as servants of his kingdom you did not rule rightly, or keep the law, or walk according to the purpose of God, he will come upon you terribly and swiftly, because severe judgment falls on those in high places” (Wisdom of Solomon 6:1–5, NRSVCE).

This secular meaning appears to be what Paul intended.³⁰⁴⁵ Whether rulers know it or not, they serve the Lord’s purposes (Isa 10:5–16).³⁰⁴⁶ As God’s servants, such rulers have two major functions.³⁰⁴⁷ By enacting just laws, they encourage people to behave morally, and they deter evildoing by punishing transgressors.³⁰⁴⁸ The Lord intends that governments reflect his wrath against evil.³⁰⁴⁹

³⁰⁴⁰Diodorus Siculus, *The Library of History*, 15.1.1, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0084%3Abook%3D15%3Achapter%3D1>.

³⁰⁴¹Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:646.

³⁰⁴²Moo, *Romans*, 422.

³⁰⁴³Hermann W. Beyer, “διάκονος” (*diakonos*), *TDNT* 2:87–93, 89–90, 93.

³⁰⁴⁴Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 764.

³⁰⁴⁵Moo, *Romans*, 422.

³⁰⁴⁶Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:665.

³⁰⁴⁷Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:665.

³⁰⁴⁸Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 801.

³⁰⁴⁹Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:666.

Paul explained, “For not without cause the sword (*machaira*) he bears.” Here “the sword” functions as a metaphor for execution.³⁰⁵⁰ The rare Greek verb *phoreō* has the nuance of something being carried continually or worn for a long time (Matt 11:8; 1 Cor 15:49).³⁰⁵¹ Human government retains the power of life and death over those who commit great evil.³⁰⁵²

This brings us to the hotly contested issue of capital punishment. The basis for execution as the penalty for murder lies in the recognition that all people are created in the image of God (Gen 9:6).³⁰⁵³ God enacted the death penalty prior to the debut of the Mosaic law. Consequently, the arrival of Christ did not negate it as part of the ceremonial law.³⁰⁵⁴

Some Christians argue that capital punishment does not mesh with the ethics of Jesus, particularly in his call to avoid revenge.³⁰⁵⁵ However, when Christ denounced the Pharisees for putting aside God’s commands in favor of human tradition, he cited an OT text concerning the death penalty without any qualifications (Mark 7:9–13). Had his death and resurrection voided it, Christ would have chosen a different verse. Yet, in the remainder of this passage, Jesus set aside the kosher dietary restrictions as no longer necessary (Mark 7:14–19).³⁰⁵⁶ Furthermore, Jesus pointed out to Pilate that God endowed him with his ability to order crucifixions (John 19:10–11). Paul also accepted the validity of the death penalty (Acts 25:11–12).³⁰⁵⁷

On the other hand, the current guideline in the United States instructs a jury to determine that a person’s guilt is “beyond a reasonable doubt.” This does not rise to the level of the biblical requirement (Deut 19:15).³⁰⁵⁸ If our courts held this standard, very few people convicted of murder would remain eligible for the death penalty.³⁰⁵⁹

In addition, the application of the death penalty as practiced in the United States reflects bias. Those convicted of murder who belong to a racial minority are far more likely to receive a death sentence than Caucasian murderers, especially when the victim was white.³⁰⁶⁰ Those who cannot afford a good lawyer often receive inadequate representation in court. Such individuals receive capital punishment at a higher rate.³⁰⁶¹ This has led some death penalty proponents to argue for an increase in executions by holding Caucasians and the wealthy to the same standard.³⁰⁶²

³⁰⁵⁰W. Michaelis, “μάχαιρα” (*machaira*), *TDNT* 4:524–7, 525–6.

³⁰⁵¹Konrad Weiss, “φορέω” (*phoreō*), *TDNT* 9:83–4, 84.

³⁰⁵²Dunn, *Romans* 9–16, 764.

³⁰⁵³Scott B. Rae, *Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics*, 3rd Ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 264.

³⁰⁵⁴Bruce W. Ballard, “The Death Penalty: God’s Timeless Standard for the Nations?” *JETS* 43, no. 3 1 September 2000):471–87, 472, http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/43/43-3/43-3-pp471-487_JETS.pdf.

³⁰⁵⁵Rae, *Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics*, 3rd Ed., 262.

³⁰⁵⁶Ballard, “The Death Penalty: God’s Timeless Standard for the Nations?” 475–6, http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/43/43-3/43-3-pp471-487_JETS.pdf.

³⁰⁵⁷Walter C. Jr. Kaiser, et al., *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 116.

³⁰⁵⁸Rae, *Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics*, 3rd Ed., 253.

³⁰⁵⁹Ballard, “The Death Penalty: God’s Timeless Standard for the Nations?” 483, http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/43/43-3/43-3-pp471-487_JETS.pdf.

³⁰⁶⁰Matt Stichter, “The Structure of Death Penalty Arguments,” *Res Publica* 20, no. 2 (1 May 2014): 135–6, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272017150_The_Structure_of_Death_Penalty_Arguments.

³⁰⁶¹Rae, *Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics*, 3rd Ed., 264.

³⁰⁶²Stichter, “The Structure of Death Penalty Arguments,” 136, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272017150_The_Structure_of_Death_Penalty_Arguments.

Another issue to consider is the tendency of witnesses to lie, especially when prosecutors promise convicts reduced sentences in exchange for testifying.³⁰⁶³ In capital cases, lawyers must fully question witnesses multiple times to detect inconsistencies in their testimony. The Mosaic law deterred providing false information by insisting that a lying eyewitness receive the penalty which the judge would have ordered for the accused person (Deut 19:16–21).³⁰⁶⁴

Thankfully, DNA testing makes a significant difference in this regard. Recent improvements in testing techniques have exonerated many death row prisoners.³⁰⁶⁵ The Innocence Project has done fantastic work to reduce the conviction of innocent people and to release wrongly incarcerated prisoners (Prov 24:11–12).³⁰⁶⁶

Where the guilt of one accused of murder is absolutely certain, Scripture seems to warrant the application of the death penalty.³⁰⁶⁷ However, even in those cases, governments must fairly apply capital punishment. A just society cannot permit discrimination.³⁰⁶⁸

Regarding why we should submit to government authority, Paul also wrote, “for of God he is a servant, an avenger for wrath against the one doing evil.” The punishments which rulers inflict upon the guilty serve as an extension of the Lord’s judgment.³⁰⁶⁹ Paul’s Jewish readers in Rome recognized this concept (Prov 24:21–22; Isa 5:26–29; Isa 8:7–8; Isa 13:1–5).³⁰⁷⁰

The Wars of the Jews made a similar statement concerning God and government: “While Josephus (37–100 AD) was making this exhortation to the Jews, many of them jested upon him from the wall, and many reproached him; nay, some threw their darts at him: but when he could not himself persuade them by such open good advice, he betook himself to the histories belonging to their own nation, and cried out aloud, ‘O miserable creatures! Are you so unmindful of those that used to assist you, that you will fight by your weapons and by your hands against the Romans? When did we ever conquer any other nation by such means? And when was it that God, who is the Creator of the Jewish people, did not avenge them when they had been injured? Will not you turn again, and look back, and consider whence it is that you fight with such violence, and how great a Supporter you have profanely abused? Will not you recall to mind the prodigious things done for your forefathers and this holy place, and how great enemies of yours were by him subdued under you?... You fight not only against the Romans, but against God himself.’”³⁰⁷¹

In conclusion, we should not separate the call to avoid vengeance in Rom 12:17–21 from

³⁰⁶³Stichter, “The Structure of Death Penalty Arguments,” 140–1, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272017150_The_Structure_of_Death_Penalty_Arguments.

³⁰⁶⁴Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 270.

³⁰⁶⁵Ballard, “The Death Penalty: God’s Timeless Standard for the Nations?” 482–3, http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/43/43-3/43-3-pp471-487_JETS.pdf.

³⁰⁶⁶Innocence Project. <http://www.innocenceproject.org/about/>.

³⁰⁶⁷Rae, *Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics, 3rd Ed.*, 264.

³⁰⁶⁸Ballard, “The Death Penalty: God’s Timeless Standard for the Nations?” 486, http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/43/43-3/43-3-pp471-487_JETS.pdf.

³⁰⁶⁹Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 802.

³⁰⁷⁰Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 765.

³⁰⁷¹Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, 5.377,

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0148%3Abook%3D5%3Awhiston%20chapter%3D9%3Awhiston%20section%3D4>.

the recognition that the Lord has endowed governments with the responsibility to uphold justice.³⁰⁷² God charges secular rulers to do for us what God has forbidden: taking revenge with our own hands.³⁰⁷³ Since the Lord appoints governing authorities to reward those who behave well and to penalize evildoers, he commands us to submit to them with all due respect.³⁰⁷⁴

Read Rom 13:3–4. How did Paul describe the functions of governing authorities? Why must we submit to secular rulers? What will happen to people who refuse to obey them? How does Rom 12:17–13:4 give you guidance when faced with injustice? In what ways would you reform capital punishment?

A Covenant with All Living Things

3) Gen 9:8–11: In the verses prior to these, the Lord blessed Noah and his sons and then gave them several prohibitions (Gen 9:1–7).³⁰⁷⁵ In keeping with the overall literary structure of a chiasm in the flood narrative (Gen 6:9–9:19),³⁰⁷⁶ Gen 9:9 repeats several key terms from Gen 6:17.³⁰⁷⁷ Furthermore, this passage refers to the covenant with Noah which the Lord formally established in Gen 6:18.³⁰⁷⁸ While God announced the destruction of the entire world before the flood, here he proclaimed its preservation.³⁰⁷⁹

Moses and his original audience understood the concept of covenants well.³⁰⁸⁰ They consist of formal treaties ratified by an oath between two parties.³⁰⁸¹ Typically, one group or individual imposed a covenant upon another as an obligation.³⁰⁸² They bound one or both parties to uphold stipulations: performing or refraining from certain duties.³⁰⁸³ Unlike most covenants, God made this pact unilaterally. He promised to keep it regardless of the human ability to obey the commands he delivered in Gen 9:4–6.³⁰⁸⁴

This passage begins by saying, “Then God spoke to Noah and his sons, saying ‘And

³⁰⁷²Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 792.

³⁰⁷³Moo, *Romans*, 421.

³⁰⁷⁴Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 800.

³⁰⁷⁵Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 316.

³⁰⁷⁶Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 158.

³⁰⁷⁷Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 146.

³⁰⁷⁸Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, 74.

³⁰⁷⁹Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 158.

³⁰⁸⁰Walton, *Genesis*, 343.

³⁰⁸¹Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton, *IVPBBOT*, Gen 9:17.

³⁰⁸²M. Weinfeld, “בְּרִית” (*berith*), *TDOT* 2:255–79, 255.

³⁰⁸³Mendenhall and Herion, “Covenant,” *ABD* 1: 1179.

³⁰⁸⁴Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview*, 246.

behold, I myself am establishing my covenant with you and your seed after you, and with all living beings which [are] with you: birds, and cattle, and every animal on the earth with you, of all which go out from the ark with you, to every animal of the earth.”

The Hebrew construction of the verb “establishing” (*qum*) makes it difficult to determine whether the Lord spoke of beginning a new treaty or continuing an existing one.³⁰⁸⁵ A majority of scholars believe it refers to a previously established relationship.³⁰⁸⁶ Some argue that God set this covenant in place at creation due to the blessing of humanity and the animals in Gen 1:20–22.³⁰⁸⁷ However, the Lord did not bless the land animals in Gen 1:24–25.

Most experts assert that God referred to the legal agreement he instituted in Gen 6:18,³⁰⁸⁸ since that verse first employs the term “covenant” (*berith*).³⁰⁸⁹ Thus, Gen 9:9–17 likely represents the fulfillment of the Lord’s earlier promise to Noah.³⁰⁹⁰ Not only did God make this covenant unilateral, it was universal.³⁰⁹¹ Within nine verses, the Lord repeated the phrase “every living being” (*kol nephesh khay*) eight times.³⁰⁹² All on earth come under its promise.³⁰⁹³ This reflects the Lord’s passionate care for both his human and nonhuman creation (Prov 12:10; Jon 4:11; Isa 11:6–9). It also proves the unilateral nature of this covenant, as animals cannot enter into binding agreements.³⁰⁹⁴

The Lord repeated, “And I establish my covenant with you. And all flesh will never again be cut off by the waters of the flood. And there will never again be a flood to ruin the earth.” This creates the antithesis of Gen 6:13, 17.³⁰⁹⁵ Hebrew grammar uses various degrees of negation. Here the Lord stated the strongest form, which means “never.”³⁰⁹⁶ Years later, God referred to the certainty of redemption for his people by citing this promise (Isa 54:7–10).³⁰⁹⁷

To be “cut off” (*kharath*) depicts God’s judgment against sin (Gen 17:14; Mic 5:10–15; Zeph 1:1–6),³⁰⁹⁸ removing someone from the safety of the Lord’s care and into death.³⁰⁹⁹ By stating twice that such a flood will never again cut off all living things, the Lord made this pronouncement emphatic. However, this covenant does not mean that judgment upon all will never occur,³¹⁰⁰ only that God will not send another cataclysmic flood (Gen 8:22).³¹⁰¹

³⁰⁸⁵J. Gamberoni, “*qum*,” *TDOT* 12:589–612, 600. Here the verb occurs as a hiphil participle.

³⁰⁸⁶Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, 75–6.

³⁰⁸⁷Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 146.

³⁰⁸⁸Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 194.

³⁰⁸⁹Result of Logos 7 word study on “בְּרִית” (*berith*).

³⁰⁹⁰Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 316.

³⁰⁹¹Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, 64.

³⁰⁹²Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 146.

³⁰⁹³Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, 64.

³⁰⁹⁴Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 316.

³⁰⁹⁵Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 195.

³⁰⁹⁶Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, 317,

<https://archive.org/stream/geseniushebrewgr00geseuoft#page/316/mode/2up>. This is an imperfect verb paired with *lo* (<https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/518/mode/2up>) (“not”).

³⁰⁹⁷Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, 66.

³⁰⁹⁸G. F. Hasel, “בְּרִית” (*berith*), *TDOT* 7:345–52, 345.

³⁰⁹⁹Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 146.

³¹⁰⁰Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 316.

³¹⁰¹Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 195.

a) **Read Gen 9:8–11.** Do you think that this speech refers to the covenant which the Lord promised to Noah in Gen 6:18? Why or why not? Whom did God include in this compact? What is its limitation? How does this passage impact your understanding of God’s care for those he creates? What can you do to emulate him?

A Bow Set in a Cloud

b) **Gen 9:12–17:** God promised Noah and his descendants to never again send such a devastating flood upon the earth (Gen 9:8–11).³¹⁰² Yet, the Lord gave another speech in which he ratified that oath with a sign.³¹⁰³ Moses reported, “And God said, ‘This is the sign of the covenant which I am making between me and you and every living being which [is] with you for eternal generations.’”

In Hebrew, a “sign” (*oth*) consists of an item, an experience, or a ceremony which enables people to perceive or remember that something is true.³¹⁰⁴ Signs can include leather boxes containing Old Testament (OT) verses which people strapped to their arms or foreheads, miracles, significant events which occurred after having been foretold, or practices which set Israel apart from others (Deut 6:8, 22; Exod 3:12; Exod 31:13).³¹⁰⁵

At critical junctures of human history, the Lord gave the rainbow, circumcision, and the Sabbath each as a sign of a covenant which he established (Gen 17:9–13; Exod 31:16–17).³¹⁰⁶ Christians observe a sign of the new covenant by participating in the sacrament of The Lord’s Supper (Luke 22:20).³¹⁰⁷ Typically, signs of the covenant remind those who participate in them of God’s presence and their resulting obligations.³¹⁰⁸

To Noah and all his descendants, God said, “My bow (*qesheth*) I have set in a cloud, and it will be for a sign of a covenant between me and the earth.” The Hebrew language does not distinguish between a rainbow and an archer’s bow.³¹⁰⁹ Therefore, a major controversy has developed among OT scholars concerning whether this verse is alluding to Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) mythologies. Even the critically acclaimed *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* provides two competing entries without reaching a definitive conclusion.³¹¹⁰

³¹⁰²Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 316.

³¹⁰³Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 194.

³¹⁰⁴F. J. Helfmeyer, “אוֹת” (*oth*), *TDOT* 1:167–88, 170.

³¹⁰⁵Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 195.

³¹⁰⁶Helfmeyer, “אוֹת” (*oth*), *TDOT* 1:181–2.

³¹⁰⁷Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 146.

³¹⁰⁸Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 195.

³¹⁰⁹Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 317.

³¹¹⁰T. Kronholm and H.-J. Fabry, “קֶשֶׁת” (*qesheth*), *TDOT* 13:201–8, 206.

People in the ANE often depicted their gods using a bow and arrows to vanquish their foes. According to the Akkadian creation epic Enuma Elish, Marduk defeated the evil water goddess Tiamat. Using a word related to the Hebrew verb for “separated” (*badhal*) (Cf. Gen 1:6–7), it says:

“Then the lord [Marduk] paused to view [Tiamat’s] dead body, that he might divide the monster and do artful works. He *split* her like a shellfish into two parts. Half of her he set up and ceiled it as sky, pulled down the bar and posted guards. He bade them to allow not her waters to escape... All the gods apportioned the stations of heaven and earth...The seven gods of destiny set up the three hundred [in heaven]. Enlil raised the bow, his weapon, and laid (it) before them. The gods, his fathers, saw the net he had made. When they beheld the bow, how skillful its shape, his fathers praised the work he had wrought.

“Raising (it), Anu spoke up in the Assembly of the gods, as he kissed the bow, ‘This is my daughter!’ He named the names of the bow as follows: ‘Longwood is the first, the second is Accurate; its third name is Bow-Star, in heaven I have made it shine.’”³¹¹¹

People in the ANE believed that constellations shaped like a bow signified the gods’ anger.³¹¹² An Assyrian relief depicts the god Assur with his bow upturned in a gesture of peace.³¹¹³ Another shows two hands of a god extending from the clouds,³¹¹⁴ with one lifted in blessing and another grasping an inverted bow.³¹¹⁵ These gods laid aside their divine wrath and turned their bows away from humanity.³¹¹⁶

Old Testament texts also describe Yahweh as a warrior who wields a bow and arrows against his enemies (Deut 32:22–23, 42–43; Ps 18:13–15; Hab 3:8–12).³¹¹⁷ While some scholars acknowledge the familiarity of Moses’ original audience with divine archers, they assert that this tradition does not inform our understanding of the rainbow.³¹¹⁸ Others contend that the ANE perspective of a weapon in a non-threatening position fits perfectly with God’s promise to never again inflict such destruction upon the earth.³¹¹⁹

Experts do agree that a rainbow reflects the cessation of the Lord’s enmity directed toward humanity (Gen 6:5–7).³¹²⁰ Against the backdrop of clouds—which had previously wrought such great destruction—God placed a sign of mercy.³¹²¹ However, this does not necessarily indicate that rainbows did not exist prior to the flood.³¹²²

³¹¹¹“Enuma Elish (The Creation Epic),” *ANET*, 4.135–40, 6:79–90, 67, 69. Italics mine.

³¹¹²Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 146.

³¹¹³Wikimedia Commons, “File: Ashur God.Jpg,” https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ashur_god.jpg. This site has a good photo.

³¹¹⁴British Museum, “Broken Obelisk,”

http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details/collection_image_gallery.aspx?assetId=269322001&objectId=277955&partId=1. Photos of this very important artifact are on this site.

³¹¹⁵Walton, *Genesis*, 345.

³¹¹⁶Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview*, 248.

³¹¹⁷Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview*, 247.

³¹¹⁸Kronholm, “רֶשֶׁת” (*qesheth*), *TDOT* 13: 206.

³¹¹⁹Fabry, “רֶשֶׁת” (*qesheth*), *TDOT* 13: 206.

³¹²⁰Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 317.

³¹²¹Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, 67.

³¹²²Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 196.

John Calvin considered such a notion “frivolous.”³¹²³ God granted theological significance to a natural sign,³¹²⁴ consecrating what had been a routine occurrence.³¹²⁵ The Lord also did that with circumcision.³¹²⁶ He adopted an already ancient practice as a sign of his covenant with Abraham and his descendants (Gen 17:9–10).³¹²⁷

God said, “And it shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth and the bow will be seen in the cloud, then I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and all living beings of flesh. And it shall never again happen that the waters shall become a flood to destroy all flesh. And when the bow is in the cloud, then I will see it to remember an eternal covenant between God and all living beings of flesh which are upon the earth.”

Whenever a rainbow emerges through the clouds, it reminds the Lord of his covenant with Noah.³¹²⁸ This enables him to overlook human depravity.³¹²⁹ God’s response to seeing a sign conforms to what Moses’ original audience experienced only a year earlier, when he passed over every home with blood above the door (Exod 12:12–13).³¹³⁰ The Hebrew word “remember” (*zakhar*) does not necessarily mean that something has been forgotten (Cf. Gen 8:1).³¹³¹ Instead, it reinforces one’s commitment to a covenant (Lev 26:45; Ps 74:2; Jer 14:20–21).³¹³² God is simultaneously omniscient and involved in the care of those dwelling on the earth.³¹³³

In the Epic of Gilgamesh, the flood hero heard a goddess declare that she would use her necklace as a sign to remind her of the flood:

“The gods smelled the savor. The gods smelled the sweet savor. The gods crowded like flies about the sacrificer. When at length as the great goddess arrived, she lifted up the great jewels which [the god] Anu had fashioned to her liking, ‘Ye gods here, as surely as this lapis upon my neck I shall not forget, I shall be mindful of these days, forgetting (them) never.’”³¹³⁴

Much as the Lord employs the rainbow, the goddess vowed to use her necklace as a sign to remind her of the flood.³¹³⁵

God’s covenant with Noah concluded with a summary statement concerning the rainbow. “And God said to Noah, ‘This [is] the sign of the covenant which I have established between me and all flesh which is upon the earth.’”

Throughout the pronouncement of this covenant, the Lord never gave Noah any commands to obey. It was strictly unilateral.³¹³⁶ God’s covenant with Noah is the first of several such pacts which the Lord has made throughout redemptive history. Ultimately, they shall

³¹²³Calvin, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, 299, <https://archive.org/stream/commentariesonfi01calvuoft#page/298/mode/2up>.

³¹²⁴Walton, *Genesis*, 345.

³¹²⁵Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 146.

³¹²⁶Walton, *Genesis*, 345.

³¹²⁷Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, 66–7.

³¹²⁸Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 196.

³¹²⁹Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 147.

³¹³⁰Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 319.

³¹³¹Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 140.

³¹³²H. Eising, “זָכַר” (*zakhar*), *TDOT* 4:70–82, 70.

³¹³³Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 146.

³¹³⁴E. A. Speiser, trans., “The Epic of Gilgamesh,” in *ANET*, 11:159–65, 95.

³¹³⁵Walton, *Genesis*, 345.

³¹³⁶Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 319.

culminate with the renewal of all creation when he releases the earth from its bondage to decay (Rom 8:19–23). With each covenant which God enacts, we come one step closer to his plan for world-wide blessing (Rev 21:1–5).³¹³⁷

Read Gen 9:12–17. How long shall this covenant continue? With whom did the Lord make it? Do you think the ANE concept of a god’s upturned bow corresponds to the sign of the rainbow? Why or why not? How can God remember something when he is omniscient? What encouragement does this passage give to you?

The World Destroyed by Water

4) 2 Pet 3:5–6: The author of 2 Peter wrote these verses to counter the belief that waiting for the return of Christ is absurd because “everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation” (2 Pet 3:3–4).³¹³⁸ He employed three main points in his counterargument that the Lord does indeed intervene in human history.³¹³⁹ Only by opting to ignore God’s activities in creating the universe and unleashing the flood could his opponents reach their conclusions.³¹⁴⁰

Much in this passage proves difficult to interpret, especially in 2 Pet 3:5.³¹⁴¹ The theory regarding how the universe works which people of that era accepted accounts for much of our frustration.³¹⁴²

He began by writing,³¹⁴³ “For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice (*lanthanō*) that the heavens and earth were long ago formed out of water and by means of water by the word of God.” This did not involve simply forgetting but deliberately choosing to reject the truth.³¹⁴⁴ Josephus (37–100 AD) used the word in a similar way when he wrote, “He could not conceal (*lanthanō*) his being a liar from Vespasian, who condemned him to die.”³¹⁴⁵

“Heavens and earth” forms a word-pair which encompasses all of creation (Matt 5:18; Matt 11:25; Rev 20:11–15).³¹⁴⁶ This common literary device, called a merism, names polar opposites, with the understanding that they include everything between them, such as “from A to Z.”³¹⁴⁷ In other words, the Lord spoke the entire cosmos into existence (e.g. Ps 33:6–9; Prov

³¹³⁷Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, 76.

³¹³⁸Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 168.

³¹³⁹Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 366–7.

³¹⁴⁰Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 297.

³¹⁴¹Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 168.

³¹⁴²Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 302.

³¹⁴³Whether this letter was written by Peter or only in his name remains a hotly debated topic, even among evangelical New Testament scholars.

³¹⁴⁴Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 169.

³¹⁴⁵Josephus, *The Life of Flavius Josephus*, 425,

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0150%3Awhiston+section%3D76>.

³¹⁴⁶Arndt, Danker, and Bauer, “οὐρανός” (*ouranos*), *BDAG*, 737.

³¹⁴⁷Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 302.

8:27–29; Heb 11:3).³¹⁴⁸ “And God said” occurs nine times in Gen 1 alone.³¹⁴⁹ Our world exists only because God said it should.³¹⁵⁰ The scoffers in Peter’s day asserted that the universe does not change. In reality, the cosmos requires divine intervention for its existence and stability (Col 1:15–17).³¹⁵¹

The difficult aspect of 2 Pet 3:5 occurs with the assertion that the heavens and earth were “formed out of and by means of water.”³¹⁵² It alludes to the account where the Lord separated water vapor from liquid water (Gen 1:2, 6–8).³¹⁵³ This passage does not assert that water is the element which forms the earth.³¹⁵⁴ Instead, God separated and gathered the waters to form dry ground (Gen 1:9–10).³¹⁵⁵

Yet, the clearest reason to assert that the Lord created the world by means of water and his word is that the phrase parallels the way he destroyed it in Noah’s day (Gen 7:4, 11–12).³¹⁵⁶ In his second argument that God remains at work in our world, the author continued, “Through which the world (*kosmos*) of that time was destroyed by being flooded with water.” Noah’s flood provided an important point against the mockers’ contention that this world system will always continue.³¹⁵⁷

The Greek verb translated as “was destroyed” (*apollumi*) has multiple meanings, some of which reflect less than annihilation.³¹⁵⁸ These include “to ruin, to kill, to lose, to fail to obtain,” and “to perish” (Rom 14:15; Matt 2:13; Luke 15:8–9; 2 John 8; Matt 26:52).³¹⁵⁹ Many of these nuances do not indicate that an object ceased to exist, but that it no longer remains in its initial state.³¹⁶⁰ The flood did not annihilate the earth or all its inhabitants. Noah, his family, and some animals survived (Gen 8:15–19).³¹⁶¹ While it wrought judgment against fallen humanity, the deluge did not wreak complete and utter destruction upon the earth (Gen 7:21–24; Gen 8:6–11).³¹⁶² Consequently, the world (*kosmos*) in this passage refers to corrupt humanity, not to the planet (Cf. 2 Pet 2:5).³¹⁶³

Creation and the destruction of the ungodly both occurred through water and the word of

³¹⁴⁸Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 15.

³¹⁴⁹Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 376.

³¹⁵⁰Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 298.

³¹⁵¹Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 374–5.

³¹⁵²Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 170.

³¹⁵³Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 297.

³¹⁵⁴Leonhard Goppelt, “ὕδωρ” (*hudor*), *TDNT* 8:314–33, 328.

³¹⁵⁵Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 297.

³¹⁵⁶Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 170.

³¹⁵⁷Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 376.

³¹⁵⁸Moo, “Nature and the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” 468, note 77, www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/49/49-3/JETS_49-3_449-488_Moo.pdf.

³¹⁵⁹Arndt, Danker, and Bauer, “ἀπόλλυμι” (*apollumi*), *BDAG*, 115–6.

³¹⁶⁰Moo, “Nature and the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” 468, note 77, www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/49/49-3/JETS_49-3_449-488_Moo.pdf.

³¹⁶¹Gale Z. Heide, “What is New About the New Heaven and the New Earth? A Theology of Creation from Revelation 21 and 2 Peter 3,” *JETS* 40, no. 1 (3 January 1997): 53–4, www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/40/40-1/40-1-pp037-056_JETS.pdf.

³¹⁶²Moo, “Nature and the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” 467, www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/49/49-3/JETS_49-3_449-488_Moo.pdf.

³¹⁶³Hermann Sasse, “κόσμος” (*kosmos*), *TDNT* 3:867–98, 890.

God.³¹⁶⁴ The Lord used them in the days of Noah to purge the world from unrighteousness.³¹⁶⁵ Peter’s interest concerned the judgment of the wicked, not cosmology.³¹⁶⁶

a) Read 2 Pet 3:5–6. Why did Peter address the issue of the destruction of the world? What did he mean by saying that the earth was formed out of water and by means of water? In what sense was the world destroyed in the days of Noah?

Reserved for Fire

b) 2 Pet 3:7: This verse says, “But now the heavens and the earth by his word are being reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and [the] destruction of ungodly people.” The author of 2 Peter divided human history into three periods separated by two cataclysmic events (Cf. 2 Pet 3:5–6).³¹⁶⁷ People who deny the return of Christ shall be caught as unaware as those in Noah’s lifetime (Matt 24:37–39).³¹⁶⁸ God will surely intervene once again.³¹⁶⁹ In the future, God shall bring about a conflagration of fire, rather than a flood to destroy humanity.³¹⁷⁰ The Lord promised to never send a deluge of such magnitude as the one in Noah’s era (Gen 9:11–17).³¹⁷¹

The center of the debate over this verse concerns what the author meant by his claim that fire will destroy the world.³¹⁷² Aside from 2 Pet 3:10, this concept of universal annihilation by flames occurs nowhere else in Scripture.³¹⁷³ Divine judgment by fire does appear in the Old Testament (OT) (Gen 19:24–25; Lev 10:1–2; Num 16:3–7, 35).³¹⁷⁴ In some instances, a metaphorical judgment by fire reflects the worst kind of disaster (Isa 30:30–33; Isa 66:15–16; Nah 1:6; Zeph 3:8).³¹⁷⁵

Bauckham asserts that the Lord will use fire to destroy the planet. He admits that OT views of the end-times do not include such a universal conflagration but instead point to the destruction of wicked people. He cites Jewish and Greek sources as the origin of his theory.³¹⁷⁶

A first century AD Jewish prophecy attributed to Eve says, “On account of your

³¹⁶⁴Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 171.

³¹⁶⁵Heide, “What is New About the New Heaven and the New Earth? A Theology of Creation from Revelation 21 and 2 Peter 3,” 54, www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/40/40-1/40-1-pp037-056_JETS.pdf.

³¹⁶⁶Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 299.

³¹⁶⁷Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 299. Whether the author of 2 Peter was the apostle or someone writing in his name remains controversial, even among evangelical scholars.

³¹⁶⁸Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 171.

³¹⁶⁹Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 377.

³¹⁷⁰Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 171.

³¹⁷¹Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 377–8.

³¹⁷²Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 172.

³¹⁷³Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 378.

³¹⁷⁴Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 300.

³¹⁷⁵Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 177–8.

³¹⁷⁶Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 300.

conspiracies, our Lord will bring upon your race the wrath of his judgment, first by water, and second by fire. By these two will the Lord judge all the human race.”³¹⁷⁷

Early Christian authors also disagreed on this topic.³¹⁷⁸ Justin Martyr, a second century AD apologist, wrote:

“Wherefore God delays causing the confusion and destruction of the whole world, by which the wicked angels and demons and men shall cease to exist...because of the seed of the Christians, who know that they are the cause of preservation in nature. Since, if it were not so...the fire of judgment would descend and utterly dissolve all things, even as formerly the flood left no one but him only with his family who is by us called Noah...from whom again such vast numbers have sprung, some of them evil and others good. For so we say that there will be the conflagration.”³¹⁷⁹

Irenaeus (ca 125–202 AD), condemned such thinking.³¹⁸⁰ He contended, “Neither is the substance nor the essence of the creation annihilated (for faithful and true is he who established it), but *the fashion of the world passes away*.”³¹⁸¹

Gnosticism was a popular view which claimed that all matter is inherently evil.³¹⁸² Consequently, its adherents believed that Jesus came as a purely spiritual being. They asserted that he neither came to earth in bodily form nor suffered death on the cross (John 1:14; Col 2:8–9; 1 John 4:1–3).³¹⁸³ Gnostics concluded that the cosmos would be destroyed, allowing their inner “sparks of light” to return to the Kingdom of Light. They posed a significant threat to the church, causing Paul to warn Timothy to avoid such beliefs (1 Tim 6:20–21).³¹⁸⁴

Irenaeus wrote that his Gnostic opponents believed, “When these things have taken place as described, then shall that fire which lies hidden in the world blaze forth and burn; and while destroying all matter, shall also be extinguished along with it, and have no further existence.”³¹⁸⁵

Instead, Irenaeus affirmed that God shall restore the world (Cf. Rom 8:16–22): “Inasmuch, therefore, as the opinions of certain [orthodox persons] are derived from heretical discourses, they are both ignorant of God’s dispensations, and of the mystery of the resurrection of the just, and of the [earthly] kingdom which is the commencement of incorruption...it is necessary to tell them respecting those things, that it behooves the righteous first to receive the promise of the inheritance which God promised to the fathers, and to reign in it, when they rise

³¹⁷⁷Berlie Custis, Gary A. Anderson, and R. Layton, trans., *The Life of Adam and Eve* (1995), 49.3, <http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/anderson/vita/english/vita.lat.html>.

³¹⁷⁸Moo, “Nature and the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” 467, www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/49/49-3/JETS_49-3_449-488_Moo.pdf.

³¹⁷⁹Justin Martyr, “The Second Apology of Justin Martyr,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus (ANF01)* (ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; trans. Philip Schaff; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1886), 7.1–3, 190, <https://archive.org/stream/antenicenefather01robe#page/190>.

³¹⁸⁰Edwin M. Yamauchi, “Gnosticism,” *DNTB*, 414–8, 414. Note that *gnōsis* (<https://archive.org/stream/greekenglishlex00liddrich#page/314>) means “knowledge” in Greek.

³¹⁸¹Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus (ANF01)* (ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; trans. Philip Schaff; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1886), 5.36.1, 566, <https://archive.org/stream/antenicenefather01robe#page/566>. Italics original.

³¹⁸²Kurt Rudolph, “Gnosticism,” *ABD* 2:1033–40, 1033.

³¹⁸³Edwin M. Yamauchi, “Gnosticism,” *New Dictionary of Theology (NDT)*, 272–4, 273.

³¹⁸⁴Kurt Rudolph, “Gnosticism,” *ABD* 2:1033.

³¹⁸⁵Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” 1.7.1, 325, <https://archive.org/stream/antenicenefather01robe#page/324>.

again to behold God in this creation which is *renovated*, and that the judgment should take place afterwards.

“For it is just that *in that very creation* in which they toiled or were afflicted...they should receive the reward of their suffering; and that in the creation in which they were slain because of their love to God, in that they should be revived again; and that in the creation in which they endured servitude, in that they should reign. For God is rich in all things, and all things are His. It is fitting, therefore, that the creation itself, being *restored to its primeval condition*, should without restraint be under the dominion of the righteous.”³¹⁸⁶

The theologian Origen (ca. 184–254 AD) wrote that flames will consume only evil things:

“But as it is in mockery that [the Greek philosopher] Celsus says we speak of ‘God coming down like a torturer bearing fire...’ We shall make a few remarks, sufficient to enable our hearers to form an idea of the defense which disposes of the ridicule of Celsus against us...The divine word says that our God is ‘a consuming fire,’ and that ‘He draws rivers of fire before Him;’ nay, that He even entereth in as ‘a refiner’s fire...’ to purify His own people.

“But when He is said to be a ‘consuming fire,’ we inquire what are the things which are appropriate to be consumed by God. And we assert that they are wickedness, and the works which result from it...For [1 Cor 3:10–15 concludes] ‘The fire will try each man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work be burned, he shall suffer loss...’ And, in like manner, ‘rivers of fire’ are said to be before God who will thoroughly cleanse away the evil which is intermingled throughout the whole soul.”³¹⁸⁷

Earlier in this letter, the author warned of “heresies which lead to destruction” (2 Pet 2:1–3). Paul also mentioned the eternal condemnation of false teachers (Cf. 1 Cor 1:18; 2 Cor 4:3; 2 Thess 2:8–10).³¹⁸⁸ Even the OT passages which speak of punishment by fire at the end of this age refer to the destruction of wicked people, not of the cosmos (Isa 66:10–24; Ezek 38:18–23; Zeph 1:14–18; Mal 4:1–3).³¹⁸⁹

Just as the Lord distinguished between righteous Noah and his contemporaries, so he will do on the day of judgment (Gen 6:1–8; Matt 13:24–30, 36–43, 47–50).³¹⁹⁰ “Destruction” (*apōleia*) consists of physical death and eternal separation from God (Matt 7:13–14; Heb 10:37–39; Rev 17:8). Mockers who scoff at the notion of the return of Christ shall experience his fury (Rev 20:11–15).³¹⁹¹

The Essenes of Qumran (second century BC–70 AD), held similar views. In this Hymn of Thanksgiving, they attributed the coming destruction to the devil:

“I thank Thee, O Lord, for Thou hast redeemed my soul from the Pit, and from the hell of

³¹⁸⁶Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus (ANF01)*, 5.32.1, 561, <https://archive.org/stream/antenicenefather01robe#page/560>. Italics mine.

³¹⁸⁷Origen, *Against Celsus* (trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885), 4.13, 502, <https://archive.org/stream/antenicenefathe00menzgoog#page/n478/mode/2up>.

³¹⁸⁸Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 93.

³¹⁸⁹Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 378.

³¹⁹⁰D. A. Carson, “2 Peter,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 1058.

³¹⁹¹Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 172.

Abaddon. Thou hast raised me up to everlasting height. I walk on limitless level ground, and I know there is hope for him whom Thou hast shaped from dust for the everlasting Council. Thou hast cleansed a perverse spirit of great sin that it may stand with the host of the Holy Ones, and that it may enter into community with the congregation of the Sons of Heaven...And yet I, a creature of clay, what am I? Kneaded with water, what is my worth and my might? For I have stood in the realm of wickedness and my lot was with the damned...

“It was a time of the wrath of all Satan and the bonds of death tightened without any escape...The torrents of Satan shall reach to all sides of the world. In all their channels a consuming fire shall destroy every tree, green and barren, on their banks; unto the end of their courses it shall scourge with flames of fire and shall consume the foundations of the earth and the expanse of dry land.

“The bases of the mountains shall blaze and the roots of the rocks shall turn to torrents of pitch; it shall devour as far as the great Abyss. The torrents of Satan shall break into Abaddon, and the deeps of the Abyss shall groan amid the roar of heaving mud. The land shall cry out because of the calamity fallen upon the world, and all its deeps shall howl. And all those upon it shall rave and shall perish amid the great misfortune.

“For God shall sound His mighty voice, and His holy abode shall thunder with the truth of His glory. The heavenly hosts shall cry out and the world’s foundations shall stagger and sway. The war of the heavenly warriors shall scourge the earth; and it shall not end before the appointed destruction which shall be forever and without compare.

“I thank Thee, O Lord, for Thou art as a fortified wall to me, and as an iron bar against all destroyers...Thou hast set my feet upon rock ...that I may walk in the way of eternity and in the paths which Thou hast chosen...”³¹⁹²

The *Babylonian Talmud* is even more explicit. Quoting a portion of Ps 46, it says: “And should you ask, in those years during which the Almighty will renew his world, as it is written, ‘And the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day, what will the righteous do? The Lord will make them wings like eagles,’ and they will fly above the water, as it is written, ‘Therefore we will not fear when the earth be removed and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.’”³¹⁹³

God and his heavenly forces shall destroy everything evil, but the Lord’s people will emerge safely.³¹⁹⁴ Just as our planet survived Noah’s flood, so shall God renew it when Jesus returns.³¹⁹⁵ When the apostle John began his description of the new heaven and earth in Rev 21:1, the Greek word he used for “new” (*kainos*) denotes something distinctly and qualitatively different. It does not mean that the object in question did not previously exist.³¹⁹⁶ Thus, our earth

³¹⁹²Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 1QH2:5–7, 197–9, https://archive.org/stream/pdf-Uy_BZ_QGsaLiJ4Zs/The%20Dead%20Sea%20Scrolls%20%5BComplete%20English%20Translation%5D#page/n311.

³¹⁹³*b*. Sanhedrin 92b, https://halakhah.com/sanhedrin/sanhedrin_92.html.

³¹⁹⁴Heide, “What is New About the New Heaven and the New Earth? A Theology of Creation from Revelation 21 and 2 Peter 3,” 50, www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/40/40-1/40-1-pp037-056_JETS.pdf.

³¹⁹⁵Moo, “Nature and the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” 467, http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/49/49-3/JETS_49-3_449-488_Moo.pdf.

³¹⁹⁶Johannes Behm, “καίνος” (*kainos*), *TDNT* 3:447–50, 447.

will be transformed, even as we will have been (1 Cor 15:50–57; 2 Cor 5:14–17; 1 Thess 4:13–18).³¹⁹⁷

a) Read 2 Pet 3:7. How did Noah’s flood parallel the destruction to come? Do you believe that the earth will be destroyed or renewed in the age to come? Why? What will happen to everything evil? Why can all of creation, including those who belong to Christ, have hope?

God’s Perception of Time

b) 2 Pet 3:8: In these verses, the author of 2 Peter addressed the turmoil within the Christian community resulting from the mockers’ question (2 Pet 3:3–4).³¹⁹⁸ He feared the confusion spread by the false teachers might undermine their faith.³¹⁹⁹ Even steadfast believers can experience doubts regarding the delay in Jesus’s return.³²⁰⁰ Those who remain committed to Jesus can be swayed by scoffers, who deliberately choose to forget the truth (2 Pet 2:1–3; 2 Pet 3:5).³²⁰¹ We need reminders concerning what Scripture teaches about the return of Christ to prevent us from discounting the notion of his imminent return.³²⁰²

This issue grabbed the attention of the original audience. In the previous letter attributed to Peter, the apostle had written, “The end of all [things] is near” (1 Pet 4:7). Furthermore, these believers may have experienced intense persecution, which dramatically increased their desire for Christ to return and set everything right. Had God forgotten his promise?³²⁰³

The author gave two reasons for the long wait.³²⁰⁴ First, to reassure them, he alluded to Ps 90:4.³²⁰⁵ This verse occurs in a song ascribed to Moses. It depicts the Lord’s reliability throughout our ephemeral lives (Ps 90:1–17).³²⁰⁶ He wrote, “But you, do not let this one [thing] escape your notice, beloved, that one day with the Lord [is] like a thousand years and a thousand years [is] like one day.” Our perception of time differs vastly from God’s. What seems like an age to us consists of a moment for him.³²⁰⁷

³¹⁹⁷Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 1040.

³¹⁹⁸Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 185. Whether the apostle or someone writing in Peter’s name wrote this letter remains in dispute, even among evangelical scholars.

³¹⁹⁹Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 378–9.

³²⁰⁰Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 185.

³²⁰¹Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 185–6.

³²⁰²Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 379.

³²⁰³Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 186.

³²⁰⁴Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 379.

³²⁰⁵Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 306.

³²⁰⁶Carson, “2 Peter,” *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 1058.

³²⁰⁷Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 186.

Some Jewish and early Christian scholars took Ps 90:4 quite literally,³²⁰⁸ using the verse to predict world history.³²⁰⁹ By replacing the word “day” with “one-thousand years,” they concocted some interesting theories.³²¹⁰ For example, they concluded that Adam lived for roughly a thousand years after his exile from Eden because that was still the same day in the Lord’s sight (Gen 2:16–17; Gen 5:3–5).³²¹¹

Others viewed the six days of creation in Gen 1 as a template for human history (Gen 1:31).³²¹² They theorized that after six thousand years, a one thousand-year millennium would arrive (Rev 20:4–6).³²¹³ This messianic age—called The Day of the Lord—would correspond to the seventh day, the first Sabbath (Gen 2:1–3).³²¹⁴

Consequently, Irenaeus (ca. 125–202 AD) wrote:

“For in as many days as this world was made, in so many thousand years shall it be concluded. And for this reason the Scripture says, ‘Thus the heaven and the earth were finished, and all their adornment. And God brought to a conclusion upon the sixth day the works that He had made; and God rested upon the seventh day from all his works.’ This is an account of the things formerly created, as also it is a prophecy of what is to come. For the day of the Lord is as a thousand years; and in six days created things were completed: it is evident, therefore, that they will come to an end at the sixth thousand year.”³²¹⁵

Such interpretations have a fatal flaw.³²¹⁶ Neither the author of 2 Peter nor Moses wrote, “One day is a thousand years.”³²¹⁷ Instead, they wrote, “One day is like (*hōs*) a thousand years.”³²¹⁸ They made an analogy, rather than a literal assertion.³²¹⁹

The creation of the sun and moon on “a fourth day” highlights the difficulty of a precise definition for the term “day,” as light had been present since “a first day” (Gen 1:1–5, 14–19).” In addition, the Hebrew word “*yom*” often loses the specific meaning “day,”³²²⁰ becoming a vague term for “time” or “moment.”³²²¹ On each of the first five days, no definite article occurs before the number of each day (e.g. “*a* second day”). In Hebrew grammar, authors employed the word “the” (*ha*) to denote a particular person or thing.³²²²

Consequently, the syntax of Genesis 1 permits a range of ideas in the length of time during which God created.³²²³ The lack of a definite article also permitted Moses to depict the

³²⁰⁸Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 306.

³²⁰⁹Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 186.

³²¹⁰Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 306.

³²¹¹Carson, “2 Peter,” *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 1059.

³²¹²Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 186.

³²¹³Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 380.

³²¹⁴Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 186.

³²¹⁵Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” 5.28.3, 557, <https://archive.org/stream/antenicenefather01robe#page/556>.

³²¹⁶Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 380.

³²¹⁷Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 186.

³²¹⁸Arndt, Danker, and Bauer, “*ὥς*” (*hōs*), *BDAG*, 1103–6, 1104.

³²¹⁹Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 380.

³²²⁰Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “*יֹמִים*” (*yom*), *BDB*, 398–401, <https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/398/mode/2up>.

³²²¹Holladay, “*יֹמִים*” (*yom*), *CHALOT*, 529.

³²²²Gesenius, *GKC*, 407, <https://archive.org/stream/geseniushebrewgr00geseuoft#page/406/mode/2up>.

³²²³Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3*, 49.

events of days one through five in a sequence other than their chronological order for literary purposes.³²²⁴ Presenting the process in a series of “days” accommodates the finite thinking of human minds.³²²⁵

God sees the passage of time much differently than we do.³²²⁶ Psalm 90:4 simply compares the Lord’s infinitude and steadfastness to humanity’s ephemeral nature. One cannot use that song to deduce the length of a day in creation while remaining faithful to the meaning of the text.³²²⁷ Since God transcends time, the delay in Christ’s return should not disturb us. When discussing this topic, Jesus told a parable which warned his disciples to prepare for his arrival at any moment (Matt 24:36–43). He immediately followed that story with another which taught them to expect a long wait (Matt 25:1–13).³²²⁸

However, the author of this letter did not chide his readers for assuming Jesus would return soon.³²²⁹ He and Paul both expected Christ to come back to earth in their lifetimes (2 Pet 3:12–15; 1 Thess 2:19; 1 Thess 4:13–18).³²³⁰

God allows millennia to pass as he achieves his aims.³²³¹ Christ’s decision not to return before now does not mean that he never will.³²³² Therefore, we must develop patience.³²³³ What appears to take an eternity to us remains but a moment for God.

Read 2 Pet 3:8. How does God view time? What impact does this have upon you as you wait for Christ’s return?

The Lord has Patience

d) 2 Pet 3:9: In this verse, the author of 2 Peter continued his theme of God’s purposeful delay (2 Pet 3:3–9).³²³⁴ He wrote, “The Lord does not delay his promise, as some consider slowness, but he has patience toward you, not desiring anyone to be destroyed but all to come to repentance.” The beginning of this verse alludes to Hab 2:3, a passage in which God responded to the prophet’s cry for deliverance from ongoing injustice.³²³⁵ Just as the Lord assured Habakkuk that he had a reason for the delay, the author of 2 Peter urged his readers not to misunderstand their long wait.³²³⁶ Contrary to the mockers’ claims, the lag does not mean that

³²²⁴Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 77.

³²²⁵Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 61.

³²²⁶Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 186.

³²²⁷Carson, “2 Peter,” *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 1059.

³²²⁸Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 379.

³²²⁹Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 186–7.

³²³⁰Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 379–80.

³²³¹Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 186.

³²³²Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 380.

³²³³Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 186–7.

³²³⁴Whether the apostle or someone writing in Peter’s name penned this letter remains controversial, even among evangelical scholars.

³²³⁵Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 310.

³²³⁶Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 380.

God reneged on his promise.³²³⁷ Christ shall return when the time is right (Acts 1:6–8).³²³⁸

The author did not merely contradict the scoffers. He provided his readers with a theological explanation for the reprieve.³²³⁹ Long-suffering as an attribute of God has a rich Old Testament tradition (Exod 34:4–7; Ps 86:1–5, 14–17; Ps 103:6–14; Jon 3:10–4:2; Neh 9:16–17).³²⁴⁰ Therefore, one should not misconstrue the Lord’s restraint with those who oppose him as negligence.³²⁴¹ He withholds judgment to give them time to experience a change of heart (Acts 3:17–26).³²⁴²

Concerning the people who lived while Noah was building the ark (Gen 6:1–4), the Jewish philosopher Philo (20 BC–40 AD) wrote, “But perhaps a hundred and twenty years are not the universal limit of human life, but only of the men living at that time, who were later to perish in the flood, after so great a number of years, which a benevolent benefactor prolonged, allowing for repentance for sins.”³²⁴³ Philo believed that God granted wicked people long life-spans to give them more opportunities to regret and turn away from their sins.

Jewish scholars in the third century AD engaged in similar discussions regarding the age to come. Citing Hab 2:3, one of them asserted:³²⁴⁴

“Blasted be the bones of those who calculate the end. For they would say, since the predetermined time has arrived, and yet he has not come, he will never come. But [even so], wait for him, as it is written, ‘Though he tarry, wait for him.’ Should you say, ‘We look forward [to his coming] but He does not.’ Therefore, Scripture saith, ‘And therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you.’ But since we look forward to it, and He does likewise, what delays [his coming]? — The Attribute of Justice delays it.”³²⁴⁵

This concept occurred in Greco-Roman thought also. Plutarch (46–122 AD) noted: “Much more becomes it us, beholding God, with whom there is neither dread nor repentance of anything, deferring nevertheless his punishments to future time and admitting delay, to be cautious and circumspect in these matters, and to deem as a divine part of virtue that mildness and long-suffering of which God affords us an example, while by punishing he reforms some few, but by slowly punishing he helpeth and admonisheth many.”³²⁴⁶

These extra-biblical authors recognized God’s delay in judging evil as an opportunity for contrition.

The author of 2 Peter then explained the rationale for God’s patience. He is “not desiring

³²³⁷Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 311.

³²³⁸Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 187.

³²³⁹Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 311.

³²⁴⁰Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 312.

³²⁴¹J. Horst, “μακροθυμέω” (*makrothumeō*), *TDNT* 4:374–87, 386.

³²⁴²Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 312.

³²⁴³Philo, *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, Trans. Ralph Marcus (LCL; Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press; William Heinemann, 1953), 1.91, 60, <https://archive.org/stream/questionsanswers00philuoft#page/60>.

³²⁴⁴Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 311.

³²⁴⁵*b*. Sanhedrin 97b, http://halakhah.com/sanhedrin/sanhedrin_97.html.

³²⁴⁶Plutarch, “De Sera Numinis Vindicta,” in *Plutarch’s Morals* (ed. William W. Goodwin; Boston; Cambridge: Little, Brown; John Wilson & son, 1874), 5, 147–8, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2008.01.0302%3Asection%3D5>.

anyone to be destroyed but all to come to repentance.” In this instance, “to be destroyed” (*apollumi*) refers to eternal ruin (1 Cor 1:18–19; Matt 10:28; James 4:12).³²⁴⁷ Christ’s delay reflects God’s deep concern for humanity, rather than his indifference to our plight (Joel 2:11–14; Rom 2:3–5).³²⁴⁸

Repentance (*metanoia*) in the New Testament typically consists of a religious and moral conversion which inaugurates a new relationship with God.³²⁴⁹ Total surrender to the way of the Lord results in forgiveness and a radical laying aside of evil. It transforms a person’s actions, thoughts, and words (Luke 24:46–47; Acts 5:30–32; 2 Tim 2:24–26).³²⁵⁰ Only by such a change of heart can we receive eternal life and escape God’s wrath (Matt 3:1–12; Acts 11:15–18).³²⁵¹

However, the author did not refer to conversion in this verse.³²⁵² He wrote that God “is patient toward you,” meaning the recipients of his letter.³²⁵³ “Anyone” refers to those individuals,³²⁵⁴ not to everyone in the world (Cf. Matt 24:42–51).³²⁵⁵ Thus, he addressed those in the church who vacillated under the influence of the scoffers.³²⁵⁶ He admonished them to repent and to hold fast to their faith (2 Pet 3:14–18; 2 Cor 12:20–21).³²⁵⁷ God patiently gave them time to turn away from the destructive teaching of the mockers.³²⁵⁸

This concept of God calling believers to repent appears frequently in early Christian literature.³²⁵⁹

For example, in the Shepherd of Hermas (ca.100–160 AD), the author declared: “The Lord dwells in men that love peace, because He loved peace; but from the contentious and the utterly wicked He is far distant. Restore to Him, therefore, a spirit sound as ye received it... what do you think the Lord will do to you, who gave you a sound spirit, which you have rendered altogether useless, so that it can be of no service to its possessor?...Will not the Lord, therefore, because of this conduct of yours regarding His Spirit, act in the same way, and deliver you over to death?...”

“Do not trample His mercy under foot, He says, but rather honor Him, because He is so patient with your sins and is not as ye are. Repent, for it is useful to you. All these things which are written above, I, the Shepherd, the messenger of repentance, have showed and spoken *to the servants of God.*”³²⁶⁰

This command to people in the early church reflects the call in 2 Pet 3:3–9 to turn aside

³²⁴⁷Albrecht Oepke, “ἀπόλλυμι” (*apollumi*), *TDNT* 1:394–6, 395–6.

³²⁴⁸Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 187.

³²⁴⁹Arndt, Danker, and Bauer, “ἀπόλλυμι” (*apollumi*), *BDAG*, 640–1, 640.

³²⁵⁰J. Behm and E. Würthwein, “μετάνοια” (*metanoia*), *TDNT* 4:975–1008, 1000, 1002, 1004.

³²⁵¹Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 381.

³²⁵²Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 382.

³²⁵³Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 188.

³²⁵⁴Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 313.

³²⁵⁵Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 382.

³²⁵⁶Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 188.

³²⁵⁷Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 382.

³²⁵⁸Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 188.

³²⁵⁹Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 313.

³²⁶⁰J. B. Lightfoot, trans., *The Shepherd of Hermas* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1891), 9.32–3, 480, <https://archive.org/stream/apostolicfathers00lighuoft#page/480>. Italics mine.

from believing scoffers and take advantage of the delay in the Lord’s return. Someday, God’s patience shall come to an end (Isa 14:26–27; Rom 2:4–11).³²⁶¹

Read 2 Pet 3:9. Do you think that this passage refers to the Lord giving all people or believers time to repent? Why? How does this admonition speak to you?

The Day of the Lord Will Come

e) **2 Pet 3:10:** Since Christ had not yet returned, the author of 2 Peter did not want his readers to think they could remain complacent.³²⁶² God has only postponed judgment day (2 Pet 3:3–9).³²⁶³ Therefore, he wrote, “But it will come—the day of the Lord—as a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be consumed by heat and destroyed. And the earth and the works in it will be found.”

Each aspect of this cosmic imagery presents difficulty for translators and interpreters.³²⁶⁴ When studying apocalyptic (end-times) passages of Scripture, which includes 2 Pet 3,³²⁶⁵ we must understand that their authors used heavily symbolic representations.³²⁶⁶ The author of 2 Peter may not have intended his readers to take what seems to be the fiery end of our planet at face value (Cf. Jer 23:29).³²⁶⁷ Therefore, we will carefully examine each of the images in this passage to differentiate what is likely metaphorical from what we should accept as literal.³²⁶⁸

By placing “it will come” first in the sentence, the author emphasized that Jesus will surely return.³²⁶⁹ In the Old Testament, “the day of the Lord” has several meanings. They include a time of God’s vengeance upon Israel’s enemies (Isa 13:1, 6–10; Ezek 30:1–5), his judgment on Israel and Judah (Amos 5:18–26; Joel 2:1–11), and a day of deliverance for all creation when he shall vindicate righteous people (Zeph 2:1–3; Mal 4:1–3).³²⁷⁰

New Testament (NT) authors used the term when discussing Christ’s return (1 Cor 1:4–8; Phil 1:6).³²⁷¹ Just like a thief, Jesus will come when people least expect him (Matt 24:36–44; 1 Thess 5:1–10).³²⁷² For those who fail to repent, that day remains a great threat (Rev 3:1–3; Rev 16:15).³²⁷³ In this verse, the author of 2 Peter warned his readers against falling into

³²⁶¹Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 312–3.

³²⁶²Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 383. Whether the apostle or someone writing in Peter’s name penned this letter remains controversial, even among evangelical scholars.

³²⁶³Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 314.

³²⁶⁴Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 189.

³²⁶⁵Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral, 2nd Ed.*, 275.

³²⁶⁶Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation, 2nd Ed.*, 445.

³²⁶⁷Moo, “Nature and the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” 464, http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/49/49-3/JETS_49-3_449-488_Moo.pdf.

³²⁶⁸Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation, 2nd Ed.*, 445.

³²⁶⁹Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 383. In Koine Greek, the word “but” cannot come first in a sentence.

³²⁷⁰Richard H. Hiers, “Day of the Lord,” *ABD* 2:82–3, 82.

³²⁷¹Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 383.

³²⁷²Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 189.

³²⁷³Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*. 314–5.

complacency.³²⁷⁴ The return of Christ can occur at any time.³²⁷⁵

A second century BC Jewish work conveys a similar idea. It says: “Do not say, ‘I sinned, and what happened to me?’ For the Lord is slow to anger. Do not be so confident of atonement that you add sin to sin. Do not say, ‘His mercy is great, he will forgive the multitude of my sins,’ for both mercy and wrath are with him, and his anger rests on sinners. Do not delay to turn to the Lord, nor postpone it from day to day; for suddenly the wrath of the Lord will go forth, and at the time of punishment you will perish” (Sirach 5:4–7, RSV).

While we know the end of this age will come, we cannot foretell the time of its demise.³²⁷⁶ The signs which precede it are vague enough for us to easily miss them.³²⁷⁷ A careful reading of the discourse in Matt 24 reveals that Jesus primarily discussed what his disciples should not view as indicators that he will return soon.³²⁷⁸

Similarly, a rigorous examination of 2 Pet 3:10 discloses that the author conveyed neither the utter destruction of this planet nor its replacement by a new one.³²⁷⁹ Instead, the Lord shall radically transform our world into an everlasting, unchanging state of perfection.³²⁸⁰ Contrary to the scoffers’ inferences, everything shall not always continue as it has (2 Pet 3:3–4).³²⁸¹

In one sense, “the heavens” (*ouranos*) refers to the physical sky which envelops the earth.³²⁸² Yet, Scripture closely links the heavens to the dwelling place of the Lord, giving the typical New Testament (NT) usage of the physical location a cosmic aspect (Matt 3:16–17; John 1:51; Acts 7:55–60). God controls the universe from the heavens (Eph 1:9–11; Heb 9:22–28).³²⁸³ Even that unseen spiritual realm shall come to an end (Matt 5:18; Heb 12:25–29).³²⁸⁴

This apocalypse will occur so forcefully and rapidly that the heavens will make a roaring noise.³²⁸⁵ When spoken, “*roizēdon*” evokes the sound of rapid hissing and crackling.³²⁸⁶ Here it alludes to a sudden rush of flames.³²⁸⁷

The Essenes wrote this:

“The deeps of the Abyss shall groan amid the *roar* of heaving mud. The land shall cry out because of the calamity fallen upon the world, and all its deeps shall howl. And all those upon it shall rave and shall perish amid the great misfortune. For *God shall sound His mighty voice*, and His holy abode shall thunder with the truth of His glory. The heavenly hosts shall cry out and the

³²⁷⁴Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 383.

³²⁷⁵Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 189.

³²⁷⁶Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 314.

³²⁷⁷Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 383.

³²⁷⁸Keener, *IVPBBCNT*, Matt 24:6–8.

³²⁷⁹Moo, “Nature and the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” 465, http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/49/49-3/JETS_49-3_449-488_Moo.pdf.

³²⁸⁰Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, 305.

³²⁸¹Moo, “Nature and the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” 467, http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/49/49-3/JETS_49-3_449-488_Moo.pdf.

³²⁸²Arndt, Danker, and Bauer, “οὐρανός” (*ouranos*), *BDAG*, 737–9, 738.

³²⁸³Helmut Traub, “οὐρανός” (*ouranos*), *TDNT*, 5:497–543, 514.

³²⁸⁴Arndt, Danker, and Bauer, “παρέρχομαι” (*parerchomai*), *BDAG*, 775–6, 776.

³²⁸⁵Arndt, Danker, and Bauer, “ροιζήδον” (*roizēdon*), *BDAG*, 907.

³²⁸⁶Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 315.

³²⁸⁷Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 189.

world’s foundations shall stagger and sway.”³²⁸⁸

It remains uncertain whether the roaring will emanate from the fire or from the thunder of God’s voice as he comes in judgment (Ps 18:12–14; Joel 3:14–16; 1 Thess 4:16).³²⁸⁹

The author of 2 Peter’s next phrase also presents us with questions. He wrote, “and the elements will be consumed by heat and destroyed.” The word translated as “elements” (*stoicheion*) has three meanings.³²⁹⁰ In antiquity, Greeks believed that four major elements constituted everything around us.³²⁹¹

For example, Plato (ca. 428–348 BC) taught:

“It is necessary...to discuss first the problem of *fire and its fellow elements*. For in regard to these it is hard to say which particular element we ought really to term *water* rather than fire, and which we ought to term any one element rather than each and all of them...First of all, we see that which we now call ‘water’ becoming by condensation...stones and *earth*; and again, this same substance, by dissolving and dilating, becoming breath and *air*; and air through combustion becoming fire; and conversely, fire when contracted and quenched returning back to the form of air and air once more uniting and condensing into cloud and mist; and issuing from these, when still further compressed, flowing water; and from water earth and stones again: thus we see the elements passing on to one another, as it would seem, in an unbroken circle the gift of birth.”³²⁹²

Some scholars believe that the author of 2 Peter wrote of these four building blocks of the universe: water, earth, air, and fire.³²⁹³ They assert that God will annihilate everything which exists in a great conflagration.³²⁹⁴

Others contend that these elements consist of the heavenly bodies separate from the earth, such as the sun, moon, stars, and other planets.³²⁹⁵ This fits well with Isa 34:4–5.³²⁹⁶ Concerning the attributes of God, a second century AD bishop asserted, “For the heavens are His work, and the earth is His creation, and the sea is His handiwork; man is His formation and His image; sun, moon and stars are His *elements*.”³²⁹⁷

In another possibility, “elements” describe the religious rituals which enslave people before they place their faith in Christ (Gal 4:1–10; Col 2:8, 20–23).³²⁹⁸ A few scholars claim that

³²⁸⁸Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 1QHa Col xi, 198–9, https://archive.org/stream/pdfy-Uy_BZ_QGsaLiJ4Zs/The%20Dead%20Sea%20Scrolls%20%5BComplete%20English%20Translation%5D#page/n313. Italics mine.

³²⁸⁹Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 315.

³²⁹⁰Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 189.

³²⁹¹Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 315.

³²⁹²Plato, “Timaeus,” 49b–d,

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0180%3Atext%3DTim.%3Asection%3D49b>.

³²⁹³Gerhard Dellling, “στοιχεῖον” (*stoicheion*), *TDNT* 7:666–87, 686.

³²⁹⁴Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 384–5.

³²⁹⁵Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 316.

³²⁹⁶Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 384.

³²⁹⁷Theophilus, “Theophilus to Autolytus,” in *Fathers of the Second Century Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (Entire) (ANF02)* (ed. Philip Schaff; Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 1.4, 90, <https://archive.org/stream/antenicenefather027898mbp#page/n101/mode/2up>.

³²⁹⁸Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 384.

these elements represent hostile spiritual forces which rule over nature.³²⁹⁹ In either case, these views do not fit the context of 2 Peter,³³⁰⁰ in which “the elements will be consumed by heat and will be destroyed.”

This leaves us with a mystery to unravel. Did the author of 2 Peter mean that flames will consume our planet to the extent that God will have to create a different earth? Or did he have in mind a purifying fire which prepares this world for renovation?³³⁰¹ The first verb which the apostle used (*kausoomai*) in the NT only here and in 2 Pet 3:12.³³⁰² It means “to be beset with burning” or “to suffer from great heat.”³³⁰³

Lucian, a second century AD Greek satirical author declared, “For by all I can learn *burning* is the quickest of deaths; a man has but to open his mouth, and all is over.”³³⁰⁴

In contrast, *luō*, the second verb in the clause, has a wide range of meanings.³³⁰⁵ These include “to loosen” (Matt 16:19), “to untie” (Mark 1:7), “to set free” (1 Cor 7:27), “to destroy” (John 2:19), “to break into its parts” (Acts 27:41), “to abolish” (Acts 2:24), “to put an end to” (Matt 5:19) and “to ransom” (Rev 1:5).³³⁰⁶ While the author wrote of a physical change, *luō* does not usually indicate annihilation. Notably, he employed the stronger verb (*apollumi*) in 2 Pet 3:6–7 when he described what Noah’s flood did to the world and its inhabitants.³³⁰⁷

At this point, 2 Pet 3:10 gets really complicated, which is why so many Bible translations differ on the last word of this verse (Cf. NASB, CSB, and NIV).³³⁰⁸ Ancient Greek manuscripts which scholars consider fairly reliable include at least five different options.³³⁰⁹ The most likely candidate to reflect the original verb is “to be found” (*heuriskō*).³³¹⁰ It appears in the earliest and most authoritative manuscripts, including two from the fourth century, *Codex Sinaiticus* and *Codex Vaticanus*.³³¹¹ This yields a translation which says, “and the earth and the works in it will be found.”

Many modern versions include translations with little support from the Greek manuscripts because “will be found” does not seem to fit the context of the passage.³³¹² However, among text critical scholars, this is precisely why that word is most likely correct, especially coupled with the manuscript evidence. When faced with difficult passages, Greek scribes often substituted words which made more sense in the context of what they were

³²⁹⁹Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 316.

³³⁰⁰Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 190.

³³⁰¹Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 385.

³³⁰²Arndt, Danker, and Bauer, “καυσώω” (*kausōō*)” *BDAG*, 536.

³³⁰³Johannes Schneider, “καυσώω” (*kausōō*)” *TDNT* 3:644.

³³⁰⁴Lucian, “The Death of Peregrine,” in *The Works of Lucian of Samosata, Volume IV* (trans. H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler; Oxford: Clarendon, 1905), 21, 86, <https://archive.org/stream/worksoflucianofs04luciuoft#page/86>. Italics mine.

³³⁰⁵Arndt, Danker, and Bauer, “λύω” (*luō*), *BDAG*, 606–7.

³³⁰⁶Friedrich Büchsel, “λύω” (*luō*), *TDNT*, 4:335–7.

³³⁰⁷Heide, “What is New About the New Heaven and the New Earth? A Theology of Creation from Revelation 21 and 2 Peter 3,” 53.

³³⁰⁸Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 190.

³³⁰⁹Nestle and Nestle, *Nestle-Aland: NTG Apparatus Criticus, 28th edition*, 714.

³³¹⁰Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, 2nd. Ed.*, 636.

³³¹¹Nestle and Nestle, *Nestle-Aland: NTG Apparatus Criticus, 28th edition*, 714. Fourth century AD.

³³¹²Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 385.

transcribing.³³¹³

Significantly, only one papyrus (P⁷², 3rd–4th century) has the word “destroyed” (*luō*) after “will be found”.³³¹⁴ “Will be burned up” (*katakaiō*) appears in several modern translations.³³¹⁵ Yet, the earliest manuscript in its favor dates from the fifth century. A few manuscripts include another form of *katakaiō*, but these occur no earlier than the tenth century.³³¹⁶ Furthermore, a scribe would be highly unlikely to substitute “will be found” for “will be burned up.”³³¹⁷ “Will vanish” (*aphanizō*) occurs in one fifth century document (C).³³¹⁸

Since the manuscripts do not include punctuation, a few commentators suggest adding a third person pronoun and a question mark. This yields the question, “Will [it] be found?” However, most experts reject that notion.³³¹⁹ Some scholars suggest adding the word “not” (*ou*) to “will be found” to make sense of the text.³³²⁰ Only two ancient witnesses, texts in the Sahidic language and one Syriac manuscript, support that reading.³³²¹

The most recent update of the *Novum Testamentum Graecae* (NA28) includes the word “not,”³³²² in contrast to the 27th edition.³³²³ This reflects a new technique which does not rely upon additional manuscript evidence.³³²⁴ Despite adhering to the NA²⁸ for the entire NT, the United Bible Society’s *Greek New Testament, Fifth Rev. Ed. (UBS 5)* gives the word “not” a “C” rating in its textual apparatus.³³²⁵ The decision in this case remains highly controversial among textual criticism scholars, with many supporting the previous reading of *heuriskō*. Most experts strenuously avoid adding words to the ancient Greek manuscripts, unless there is no other way to understand the text.³³²⁶ Consequently, the *Tyndale House Greek New Testament* continues to omit the word “not.”³³²⁷

The United Bible Society gave “will be found” a grade of “D” for authenticity, noting that it “seems to be devoid of meaning in the context.” Yet, as the oldest available reading,³³²⁸ that word remains the best option we have.³³²⁹ However, examining other appearances of the

³³¹³Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 191.

³³¹⁴Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 385.

³³¹⁵Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 317.

³³¹⁶Nestle and Nestle, *Nestle-Aland: NTG Apparatus Criticus, 28th edition*, 714.

³³¹⁷Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 317.

³³¹⁸Nestle and Nestle, *Nestle-Aland: NTG Apparatus Criticus, 28th edition*, 714.

³³¹⁹Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 386.

³³²⁰Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 317.

³³²¹Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, 2nd. Ed.*, 636.

³³²²Erwin Nestle et al, *Novum Testamentum Graecae, 28th Ed (NA28)* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2013), 714, <http://www.nestle-aland.com/en/read-na28-online/text/bibeltext/lesen/stelle/71/30001/39999/>.

³³²³Erwin Nestle Eberhard Nestle Barbara Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graecae, 27th Edition (NA27)* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 614.

³³²⁴Nestle and Nestle, *Nestle-Aland: NTG Apparatus Criticus, 28th edition*, 714.

³³²⁵Barbara Aland, et al., *The Greek New Testament, 5th Rev. Ed.* (Muenster, Germany; Stuttgart: Institute for New Testament Textual Research, 2014), 781.

³³²⁶Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 318.

³³²⁷Dirk Jongkind and Peter Williams, eds., *The Greek New Testament Produced at Tyndale House, Cambridge* (Cambridge: Crossway, 2017), 314.

³³²⁸Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, 2nd. Ed.*, 636.

³³²⁹Moo, “Nature and the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” 468, http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/49/49-3/JETS_49-3_449-488_Moo.pdf.

verb minimizes the enigmatic nature of this conundrum. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament and in the New Testament, “to be found” (*heuriskō*) often connotes having one’s morals or religious nature scrutinized. Either people or God can conduct this judicial investigation (Gen 44:16; Dan 5:22–28; Ezra 10:17–19; 1 Cor 15:15; 1 Pet 1:7–8; Rev 14:5).³³³⁰

A similar concept occurs in the Psalms of Solomon, a first century BC Jewish work: “Sinners rose up against us because of our sins; they laid hold of us and expelled us; those to whom you did not promise removed us with force, and they did not glorify your honored name...They desolated the throne of David in arrogance...And you, God, will cast them down and remove their seed from the earth...You will repay them according to their sins, God, so that *it will be found* against them according to their works. God will have no pity on them; he searched their seed and let not one of them go; the Lord is faithful in all his judgments that he makes upon the earth.”³³³¹

Consequently, we can interpret this clause in 2 Pet 3:10 as, “and the earth and the works in it will be laid bare” (Rom 2:14–16; Heb 4:8–13).³³³² Our planet has served the center stage throughout human history. A scorching flame shall reveal all the evil which people have perpetrated upon the earth, exposing their sin (Isa 2:19–21; Isa 26:20–21; 1 Cor 3:10–15; Rev 6:12–17).³³³³

Indeed, the author used the same verb to admonish the recipients of this letter to be found blameless in God’s sight at the time of Christ’s return (2 Pet 3:14).³³³⁴ Thus, he emphasized the impending judgment of people, rather than the destruction of the universe.³³³⁵ The same conflagration which will annihilate unrighteousness will purify the earth (Zech 13:8–9; Mal 3:1–6; 1 Cor 3:10–17).³³³⁶ Those whom the Lord sees as righteous shall survive this process.³³³⁷

This interpretation meshes with the Wisdom of Solomon, an apocryphal Jewish work (2nd century BC–1st century AD):

“But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them. In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be a disaster, and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace. For though in the sight of others they were punished, their hope is full of immortality. Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good, because God tested them and *found them* worthy of himself; like gold in the furnace, he tried them, and like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted them. In the time of their visitation, they will shine forth and will run like sparks through the stubble. They will govern nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord will reign over them forever” (Wisdom 3:1–

³³³⁰Herbert Preisker, “εὐρίσκω” (*heuriskō*), *TDNT* 2:769–70.

³³³¹Brannan, et al., *The Lexham English Septuagint*, Ps Sol 17:6–12.

³³³²Moo, “Nature and the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” 468, http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/49/49-3/JETS_49-3_449-488_Moo.pdf.

³³³³Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 319–20.

³³³⁴Heide, “What is New About the New Heaven and the New Earth? A Theology of Creation from Revelation 21 and 2 Peter 3,” 50, www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/40/40-1/40-1-pp037-056_JETS.pdf.

³³³⁵Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 319.

³³³⁶Heide, “What is New About the New Heaven and the New Earth? A Theology of Creation from Revelation 21 and 2 Peter 3,” 54, www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/40/40-1/40-1-pp037-056_JETS.pdf.

³³³⁷Wolters, “Worldview and Textual Criticism in 2 Peter 3:10,” 408, www.allofliferedeemed.co.uk/Wolters/AMW2Peter3.pdf.

8, NRSVCE).

The Epistle of Barnabas (ca. 80–120 AD) affirms this:

“It is good therefore to learn the ordinances of the Lord...and to walk in them. For he that doeth these things shall be glorified in the kingdom of God; whereas he that chooseth their opposites shall perish together with his works. For this cause is the resurrection, for this the recompense... The day is at hand, in which everything shall be destroyed together with the Evil One. The Lord is at hand and his reward...And may God, who is Lord of the whole world, give you wisdom, judgment, learning, knowledge of His ordinances, patience. And be ye taught of God, seeking diligently what the Lord requireth of you, and act that *ye may be found* in the day of judgment.”³³³⁸

On the day of the Lord, God will lay bare the heavens and earth.³³³⁹ Everything will be exposed as it really is and be purified from all evil, just as fire removes the dross from metal ore. During Noah’s flood, the Lord cleansed the world by water (Gen 7:17–24; Gen 8:6–11). In the future, he shall decontaminate it with fire.³³⁴⁰ Total annihilation shall not be necessary (Rom 8:16–25).³³⁴¹ Instead, God shall renew the heavens and the earth (Rev 21:1–5).³³⁴²

Read 2 Pet 3:10. What are the implications of the day of the Lord coming like a thief? How will fire affect the cosmos? What will this conflagration do to people? How does knowing this impact you?

Hastening the Day of God

f) 2 Pet 3:11–12: After discussing the return of Jesus in 2 Pet 3:3–10,³³⁴³ the author of this letter shifted his attention to how we should respond to that knowledge.³³⁴⁴ He wrote, “Since all these [things] are being destroyed (*luō*) in this way, it is necessary for you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God.”

Luō has a wide range of meanings.³³⁴⁵ These include “to loosen” (Matt 16:19), “to untie” (Mark 1:7), “to set free” (1 Cor 7:27), “to destroy” (John 2:19), “to break into its parts” (Acts 27:41), “to abolish” (Acts 2:24), “to put an end to” (Matt 5:19) and “to ransom” (Rev 1:5).³³⁴⁶

³³³⁸J. B. Lightfoot, trans., “The Epistle of Barnabas,” in *The Apostolic Fathers, Vol. 2* (New York; London: MacMillan, 1891), 21:1–6, 287–8, <https://archive.org/stream/apostolicfathers00lighuoft#page/286>. Italics mine.

³³³⁹Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 386.

³³⁴⁰Wolters, “Worldview and Textual Criticism in 2 Peter 3:10,” 407–8, www.allofliferedeemed.co.uk/Wolters/AMW2Peter3.pdf.

³³⁴¹Heide, “What is New About the New Heaven and the New Earth? A Theology of Creation from Revelation 21 and 2 Peter 3,” 55, www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/40/40-1/40-1-pp037-056_JETS.pdf.

³³⁴²Moo, “Nature and the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” 469, http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/49/49-3/JETS_49-3_449-488_Moo.pdf.

³³⁴³Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 196.

³³⁴⁴Carson, “2 Peter,” *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 1059. Whether Peter or someone writing in his name penned 2 Peter remains highly controversial even among evangelical scholars.

³³⁴⁵Arndt, Danker, and Bauer, “λόω” (*luō*), *BDAG*, 606–7.

³³⁴⁶Friedrich Büchsel, “λόω” (*luō*), *TDNT*, 4:335–7.

While the author wrote of a physical change, *luō* does not usually indicate annihilation. Notably, he employed the stronger verb (*apollumi*) in 2 Pet 3:6–7 when he described what Noah’s flood did to the world and its inhabitants.³³⁴⁷

Given that the author used the present tense for “being destroyed,” he proclaimed that God is already undoing our current system.³³⁴⁸ The process of dissolution began in Eden (Gen 3:17–19; 2 Cor 4:16–18; Rom 8:20–21).

As the people of God, we must ready ourselves to inhabit the new age (1 Pet 1:13–17).³³⁴⁹ Everything we do should reflect the holiness of Christ (2 Pet 1:2–11).³³⁵⁰ Within the New Testament (NT) the word translated as “looking for” (*prosdokaō*) usually occurs in the context of anticipating end-time salvation (Cf. Matt 11:2–5; Luke 3:15; Luke 12:42–48).³³⁵¹ The author employed the term three times in 2 Pet 3:11–13 to emphasize the earnest expectancy believers should foster when considering the return of Christ.³³⁵²

“Hastening” (*speudō*) implies that we can cause something to occur by exerting extra effort.³³⁵³ This appears to allude to Isa 60:18–22.³³⁵⁴ In most Jewish apocryphal literature, the Lord himself speeds the coming of the day of God.³³⁵⁵

According to the Apocalypse of Baruch (first–second century AD):
 “I besought the Mighty One and said, “Thou alone O Lord knowest of aforesaid the deep things of the world, and the things which befall in their times Thou bringest about by the word. And against the works of the inhabitants of the earth *Thou dost hasten* the beginnings of the times. And the ends of the seasons Thou alone knowest...But thou doest everything easily by a nod. [You] revealest to those who fear Thee what is prepared for them that henceforth they may be comforted.”³³⁵⁶

On the other hand, in the *Babylonian Talmud* (first century BC to fifth century AD), a group of rabbis discussed the necessary conditions for the messiah to arrive. They argued: “Rabbi Johanan also said, ‘The son of David will come only in a generation that is either altogether righteous or altogether wicked. In a generation that is altogether righteous—as it is written, “Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land forever” [Ps 37:29]. Or altogether wicked—as it is written, “And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor” [Isa 59:16]; and it is [elsewhere] written, “For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it” [Isa 48:11].

“Rabbi Alexandri said, ‘Rabbi Joshua ben Levi pointed out a contradiction. “It is written, in its

³³⁴⁷Heide, “What is New About the New Heaven and the New Earth? A Theology of Creation from Revelation 21 and 2 Peter 3,” 53, www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/40/40-1/40-1-pp037-056_JETS.pdf.

³³⁴⁸Moo, “Nature and the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” 468, www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/49/49-3/JETS_49-3_449-488_Moo.pdf.

³³⁴⁹Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 324.

³³⁵⁰Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 197.

³³⁵¹Christian Maurer, “προσδοκάω” (*prosdokaō*), *TDNT* 6:725–7, 726.

³³⁵²Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 390.

³³⁵³Arndt, Danker, and Bauer, “σπεύδω” (*speudō*), *BDAG*, 938.

³³⁵⁴Carson, “2 Peter,” *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 1060.

³³⁵⁵Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 325.

³³⁵⁶R. H. Charles, trans., *The Apocalypse of Baruch* (London; New York: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; MacMillan, 1918), 54:1–4, 71, <https://archive.org/stream/apocalypseofbaru00char#page/70>.

time [will the Messiah come]” [Song 2:7], whilst it is also written, “I [the Lord] will hasten it [Isa 60:22]!—If they are worthy, I will hasten it: if not, [he will come] at the due time.”” Rabbi Alexandri said, ‘R. Joshua opposed two verses, “It is written, ‘And behold, one like the son of man came with the clouds of heaven’ [Dan 7:13] whilst [elsewhere] it is written, ‘[behold, thy king cometh unto thee...] lowly, and riding upon an ass [Zech 9:9]!’—If they are meritorious, [he will come] with the clouds of heaven; if not, lowly and riding upon an ass.’”³³⁵⁷

These rabbis believed that God’s people speed the messiah’s coming by their repentance. Furthermore, their behavior would determine the manner of his arrival.³³⁵⁸ In their view, if every Israelite would repent or keep the law perfectly for a day, the messiah would return to deliver them from foreign domination and usher in the new age of peace.³³⁵⁹

Consequently, an Aramaic expansion of Song 8:14 pleads, “Watch over us and observe our trouble and affliction from the highest heavens, till such time as you are pleased with us and redeem us and bring us up to the mountains of Jerusalem, where the priests will offer up before you incense of spices.”³³⁶⁰

This Jewish concept of hastening the age to come by our repentance extends into Christian teaching.³³⁶¹ The Lord takes the actions of his people into account when determining the time for Christ to return (Acts 3:19–21).³³⁶² Godliness advances the day of the Lord,³³⁶³ as does prayer and preaching the gospel to all people-groups (Matt 6:10; Matt 24:14).³³⁶⁴

Nevertheless, God remains sovereign.³³⁶⁵ While he calls us to live holy lives, he also determines our steps (Deut 30:6–10; Ps 80:14–19; Ezek 36:24–27; Phil 2:12–13; Eph 2:4–10).³³⁶⁶ Our behavior matters, yet God’s control persists.³³⁶⁷ We must hold both truths in tension, as we seek to expedite the return of Christ.³³⁶⁸

His second coming will result in cataclysmic judgment and glorious renewal,³³⁶⁹ “because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and destroyed (*luō*) and the elements, consumed by heat, are melted.”

Stoics believed time is cyclical. They taught that a great conflagration periodically consumed the earth and then the planet was renewed.³³⁷⁰

³³⁵⁷b. Sanhedrin 98a, http://halakhah.com/sanhedrin/sanhedrin_98.html.

³³⁵⁸Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 325.

³³⁵⁹N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 187.

³³⁶⁰Penelope Robin Junkermann, “The Relationship Between Targum Song of Songs and Midrash Rabbah Song of Songs” (Manchester, UK: University of Manchester, 2010), 182,

<https://www.escholar.manchester.ac.uk/api/datastream?publicationPid=uk-ac-man-scw:105720&datastreamId=FULL-TEXT.PDF>.

³³⁶¹Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 198.

³³⁶²Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 325.

³³⁶³Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 390.

³³⁶⁴Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 198–9.

³³⁶⁵Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 325.

³³⁶⁶Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 390.

³³⁶⁷Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 198.

³³⁶⁸Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 391.

³³⁶⁹Carson, “2 Peter,” *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 1060.

³³⁷⁰Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 300.

Cicero (106–43 BC) wrote:

“The stars are of a fiery substance, and for this reason they are nourished by the vapors of the earth, the sea and the waters, which are raised up by the sun out of the fields which it warms and out of the waters; and when nourished and renewed by these vapors the stars and the whole ether shed them back again, and then once more draw them up from the same source, with the loss of none of their matter, or only of an extremely small part which is consumed by the fire of the stars and the flame of the ether.

“As a consequence of this...there will ultimately occur a conflagration of the whole world, because when the moisture has been used up neither can the earth be nourished nor the air continue to flow, being unable to rise upward after it has drunk up all the water; thus nothing will remain but fire, by which, as a living being and a god, once again a new world may be created and the ordered universe be restored as before.”³³⁷¹

Contrary to Stoic beliefs, the destruction which the author of 2 Peter proclaimed will be a one-time event which does not result from a natural progression.³³⁷²

He then elaborated upon the theme of the destruction of the heavens and the earth from 2 Pet 3:10. The verb “to melt” (*tēkō*) appears nowhere else in the NT. However, it occurs frequently in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (53 x) and in Greco-Roman literature (970 x).³³⁷³ In this case, it depicts a future event despite being written in the present tense.³³⁷⁴ Koine Greek authors employed this literary device to convey certainty or the impending nature of an event.³³⁷⁵

The Greek translation of Isa 64:1–2 says, “If you open the sky, trembling will take hold of the mountains at you, and they will melt like wax melts before a fire. And fire will consume the enemies, and your name will be evident among the enemies” (Cf. Mic 1:2–4).³³⁷⁶ Second Clement (ca. 130–160 AD) connects this destruction with the revealing of human evil:

“Seeing, therefore, brethren, that we have received no small opportunity for repentance, let us turn to the God who calls us, while we still have one who awaits us. For if we bid farewell to these enjoyments and conquer our soul by giving up its wicked lusts, we shall share in the mercy of Jesus. But you know that ‘the day’ of judgment is ‘already approaching as a burning oven, and some of the heavens shall melt,’ and the whole earth shall be as melting lead in the fire, and *then*

³³⁷¹M. Tullius Cicero, *De Natura Deorum Academia* (vol. 19 of *Cicero in Twenty-Eight Vols.*; trans. H. Rackham; LCL; Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press; Heinemann, 1933), 2.118–9, 235–7, <https://archive.org/stream/denaturadeorumac00ciceuoft#page/234>.

³³⁷²Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 325.

³³⁷³Result of word study of “τήκω” (*tēkō*) in Logos 7.

³³⁷⁴Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 391.

³³⁷⁵Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, 535–6.

³³⁷⁶Brannan et al., *The Lexham English Septuagint*, Isa 64:1–2.

*shall be manifest the secret and open deeds of men.*³³⁷⁷

In a parallel NT passage, John described his vision of God sitting on a throne in judgment. He noted, “And from his face fled the earth and the heaven, and a place was not found (*heuriskō*) for them” (Rev 20:11). In keeping with 2 Pet 3:10, this likely refers to judgment upon sin in this world.³³⁷⁸

Read 2 Pet 3:11–12. How can you help to hasten Christ’s return? What will occur when he arrives?

New Heavens and a New Earth

g) 2 Pet 3:13: The author of this letter wrote, “But [there will be] new heavens and a new earth, according to his promise, in which righteousness dwells.”³³⁷⁹ In Koine Greek, we can translate two major terms as “new.” *Neos* indicates the appearance of something which was did not previously exist. Meanwhile, *kainos* suggests that something already in existence exhibits a distinctly different quality.³³⁸⁰ In this case, the author used *kainos*.

In Rev 21:5, God exclaims, “Behold, new (*kainos*) I am making everything!” He did not say, “Behold, I am making new things!” This implies the restoration of the heavens and the earth to what God originally intended, rather than complete destruction.³³⁸¹ On the same day when the ungodly shall experience destruction,³³⁸² those who belong to Christ shall step into the transformed realm of the new earth and heavens (2 Pet 3:3–12; Isa 65:17–24; Matt 19:27–29).³³⁸³ Based upon the description in Rev 21–22, a radical renovation will occur.³³⁸⁴

Noah stepped out of the ark into very different world than he previously experienced (Gen 8:6–14). We shall be even more amazed by the transformation of our renewed earth.³³⁸⁵ Our transformed planet shall be a place “in which righteousness dwells.” Aside from this allusion to Isa 32:16, the author provided no description of the new earth.³³⁸⁶ Righteousness and

³³⁷⁷Lake, Kirsopp, trans. “2 Clement,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with an English Translation, Vol. 1*. (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press; William Heinemann, 1912), 16:1–4, 154–5, <https://archive.org/stream/TheApostolicFathersV1#page/n167>. Italics mine.

³³⁷⁸Moo, “Nature and the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” 466, www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/49/49-3/JETS_49-3_449-488_Moo.pdf.

³³⁷⁹Whether the apostle or someone using his name wrote this letter remains highly controversial, even among evangelical scholars.

³³⁸⁰Johannes Behm, “καίνος” (*kainos*), *TDNT* 3:447–54, 447.

³³⁸¹Moo, “Nature and the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” 466–7, www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/49/49-3/JETS_49-3_449-488_Moo.pdf.

³³⁸²Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 391.

³³⁸³Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 199.

³³⁸⁴Moo, “Nature and the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” 469, www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/49/49-3/JETS_49-3_449-488_Moo.pdf.

³³⁸⁵Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 326.

³³⁸⁶Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 199–200.

justice permeate God’s kingdom (Matt 5:10–16; Matt 6:33; Heb 1:8–9).³³⁸⁷ Therefore, the age to come shall resound with the beauty and glory of God’s holy will (Matt 6:10).³³⁸⁸

As in Noah’s day, the world shall be cleansed from unrighteousness (Gen 6:1–13; Gen 7:11–12, 21–24).³³⁸⁹ Nothing evil can enter (Isa 66:22–24; Rev 22:12–15).³³⁹⁰ Therefore, we must not abandon our hope, as the scoffers did, but live righteously (2 Pet 3:3–4, 14–18).³³⁹¹

The author of 1 Enoch (second century BC–first century AD) concurred:

“And this is the second parable concerning those who deny the name of the dwelling of the holy ones and the Lord of Spirits. And into the heaven they shall not ascend, and on the earth they shall not come. Such shall be the lot of the sinners who have denied the name of the Lord of Spirits, who are thus preserved for the day of suffering and tribulation. On that day mine elect one shall sit on the throne of glory and shall try their works, and their places of rest shall be innumerable.

“And their souls shall grow strong within them when they see mine elect ones, and those who have called upon My glorious name. Then will I cause mine elect one to dwell among them. And I will transform the heaven and make it an eternal blessing and light, and I will transform the earth and make it a blessing. And I will cause mine elect ones to dwell upon it. But the sinners and evil doers shall not set foot thereon. For I have provided and satisfied with peace my righteous ones and have caused them to dwell before me. But for the sinners there is judgement impending with me, so that I shall destroy them from the face of the earth.”³³⁹²

This apocryphal writer recognized that God will remake our world.³³⁹³

Our planet has a future.³³⁹⁴ The author of 2 Peter employed terms in this chapter which sound as if this world shall end. Nevertheless, scrutiny reveals that it shall undergo restoration rather than replacement (Acts 3:12, 19–21).³³⁹⁵ Only after its cleansing can the earth serve as a fitting place for the Lord’s resurrected people (1 Cor 15:50–58).³³⁹⁶

This paraphrase of 2 Pet 3:10–13 captures the apostle’s intent well:

“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens as we know them will pass from sight with a roar and the order of this world will be refined with intense heat, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare for judgment. Since all these things are to be refined in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, anticipating and hastening the day of God, when the heavens will be refined by burning and the impure order of

³³⁸⁷Gottlob Schrenk, “δικαιοσύνη” (*dikaiosunē*), *TDNT* 2:174–225, 199. This word can be translated as “justice” and as “righteousness.”

³³⁸⁸Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 326.

³³⁸⁹Heide, “What is New About the New Heaven and the New Earth? A Theology of Creation from Revelation 21 and 2 Peter 3,” 54–5, www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/40/40-1/40-1-pp037-056_JETS.pdf.

³³⁹⁰Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 392.

³³⁹¹Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 326.

³³⁹²Charles, trans., “Book of Enoch,” 45:1–6, <https://archive.org/stream/cu31924067146773#page/n197/mode/2up>.

³³⁹³Carson, “2 Peter,” *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 1060.

³³⁹⁴Heide, “What is New About the New Heaven and the New Earth? A Theology of Creation from Revelation 21 and 2 Peter 3,” 55, www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/40/40-1/40-1-pp037-056_JETS.pdf.

³³⁹⁵Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 201.

³³⁹⁶Moo, “Nature and the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” 469, www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/49/49-3/JETS_49-3_449-488_Moo.pdf.

this world will melt in the intense heat of judgment! But according to his promise we are looking for renewed heavens and a renewed earth, in which righteousness dwells.”³³⁹⁷

Read 2 Pet 3:13. What evidence do we have in this verse that God will renovate—rather than replace—this planet? How should our knowledge that the Lord will judge evil will renew the earth affect the way we live? In what ways do we resemble Noah?

Set Free from the Slavery of Corruption

5) Rom 8:21–22: After noting that nature has been subjected to futility due to human sin (Rom 8:20), Paul continued, “Even creation itself will be set free from the slavery of corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that all creation groans and travails together until the present time.”

Paul declared the content of creation’s hope: that it “itself will be set free.” God has set his people free from the slavery of sin and death (Rom 6:18, 22; Rom 8:2; Eph 1:3–11). So shall he liberate creation from its bondage.³³⁹⁸ Christ’s death and resurrection ensures this eventuality (Col 1:15–20; 1 Cor 15:20–23, 50–58). Even nature shall undergo redemption. God will not rescue us from it.³³⁹⁹ The apostle’s choice of “will be set free” (*eleutheroō*)³⁴⁰⁰—rather than “undone” (*luō*)³⁴⁰¹ or “destroyed” (*apollumi*)³⁴⁰² counters the notion that the world shall end in destruction. Thus, this passage contradicts the Greek dualism and the spirit/matter dichotomy which remain prevalent in our churches.³⁴⁰³

Note that in 2 Pet 3:6–7, “the world” (*kosmos*) which God annihilated by the flood refers to the ungodly people inhabiting the earth during the time of Noah, not to the planet itself (Matt 13:24–30, 36–43).³⁴⁰⁴ We await the renovation of the earth when the new Jerusalem descends (Rev 21:1–2), not its replacement.³⁴⁰⁵

“The slavery (*douleia*) of corruption (*phthora*)” alludes to the inevitable decay of all

³³⁹⁷Heide, “What is New About the New Heaven and the New Earth? A Theology of Creation from Revelation 21 and 2 Peter 3,” 55, www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/40/40-1/40-1-pp037-056_JETS.pdf.

³³⁹⁸ Osborne, *Romans*, 212.

³³⁹⁹ Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 471.

³⁴⁰⁰Danker, et al., “ἐλευθερωω” (*eleutheroō*), *BDAG*, 317.

³⁴⁰¹ Danker et al., “λυω” (*luō*), 607.

³⁴⁰² Danker, et al., “ἀπολλυμι” (*apollumi*), 117.

³⁴⁰³ Moo, “Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” 450, http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/49/49-3/JETS_49-3_449-488_Moo.pdf.

³⁴⁰⁴ Danker et al., “κοσμος” (*kosmos*), 562.

³⁴⁰⁵ Moo, “Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” 455, http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/49/49-3/JETS_49-3_449-488_Moo.pdf.

created things.³⁴⁰⁶ This is consistent with Greek thought, with Paul’s earlier writing in 1 Cor 15:50,³⁴⁰⁷ and with the Second Law of Thermodynamics.

John Calvin noted, “We may...infer from this how dreadful is the curse which we have deserved, since all innocent creatures from earth to heaven are punished for our sins (Jer 12:4). It is our fault that they struggle in corruption.”³⁴⁰⁸

In Greco-Roman society, the strict dichotomy between slavery and freedom accentuated the radical nature of the transformation envisioned by Paul.³⁴⁰⁹ The Old Testament (OT) depicts Israel’s exile as a reversal of creation order into chaos (Jer 4:23–27).³⁴¹⁰

However, due to the Lord’s justice,³⁴¹¹ he assures us of a return to the conditions of Eden in the new Adam (Gen 2:8–14; Gen 1:31; Rom 5:12–21).³⁴¹² God will overturn creation’s systemic deficiencies due to the curse upon the ground (Gen 3:17–18), so that nature may enter “into the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Ps 96:7–13; Jer 31:10–14; Hos 2:18–23).³⁴¹³ Then people will say, “This land which was desolate has become like the garden of Eden” (Ezek 36:35).³⁴¹⁴ The Lord shall banish evil and his elect will enter into complete harmony with our creator.³⁴¹⁵ At that time, God shall at last achieve his original intention for our planet (Gen 1:28).³⁴¹⁶

This theme of the spread of God’s kingdom throughout all of creation appears in the Assumption of Moses, a Jewish apocryphal book dating from the time of Christ’s birth: “And then his [God’s] kingdom will appear throughout all his creation, and then Satan will be no more, and sorrow will depart with him...For the Heavenly One will arise from his royal throne, and he will go forth from his holy habitation and his wrath will burn on account of his sons. And the earth will tremble: to its confines will it be shaken. And the high mountains will be made low and the hills will be shaken and fall...For the Most High will arise...and he will appear to punish the gentiles, and he will destroy all their idols. Then thou, Israel, wilt be happy, and thou wilt mount upon the neck[s and wings] of the eagle, and (the days of thy mourning) will be ended. And God will exalt thee, and he will cause thee to approach to the heaven of the stars, and he will establish thy habitation among them.”³⁴¹⁷

³⁴⁰⁶Frank J. Matera, *Romans* (PCNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 201.

³⁴⁰⁷Moo, “Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” 452, http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/49/49-3/JETS_49-3_449-488_Moo.pdf.

³⁴⁰⁸John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians* (ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance; trans. Ross MacKenzie; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 174. <https://archive.org/stream/commentaryonepis00calv#page/330/mode/2up>.

³⁴⁰⁹Ceslas Spicq, “δοῦλος” (*doulos*), *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament (TLNT)*, Vol. 1, (James D. Ernest, trans., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 380.

³⁴¹⁰Ciampa, “The History of Redemption,” 273.

³⁴¹¹Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 25.

³⁴¹²Matera, *Romans*, 201.

³⁴¹³Ciampa, “The History of Redemption,” 273.

³⁴¹⁴Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 34.

³⁴¹⁵Moo, “Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” 456, http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/49/49-3/JETS_49-3_449-488_Moo.pdf.

³⁴¹⁶Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, 81–2.

³⁴¹⁷R. H. Charles, trans., “The Assumption of Moses,” in *The Assumption of Moses* (Edinburgh; London: Black, 1897), 10.1–9, 38–43, <https://archive.org/stream/assumptionofmose00unknuoft#page/38/mode/2up>.

Of all the OT prophets, Isaiah delivered the most complete picture of the state of the universe after Christ announces, “Behold, I am making all things new” (Rev 21:5). Isaiah 11 describes “the root of Jesse” (v. 1) who shall destroy all evil (v. 4), leaving even a little child to lead a lion who will lie down with a lamb (v. 6). God said, “For they shall not cause evil nor ruin in all my holy mountain because the earth [shall be] filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as waters cover the sea” (v. 11). Other passages with such end-time promises include Isa 51:3–11;³⁴¹⁸ Isa 55:6–13; Isa 65:17–25 and Isa 66:22–23.³⁴¹⁹

Since redeemed people must inhabit a fitting environment,³⁴²⁰ the reclamation anticipated by believers shall extend to the created order.³⁴²¹ Indeed, the resurrection of people without the restoration of creation bears little resemblance to the gospel preached by the apostle (Eph 1:9–10; Col 1:15–20).³⁴²²

The God-focused perspective of the mandate in Gen 1:26–28 states our commission not in terms of domination but of stewardship. It does not give people license to abuse the environment. In fact, we should fashion the model for our own rule of the earth after Jesus’s charge to his disciples (Mark 10:45). When a man asked Christ to name the greatest commandment, he responded with two of them (Matt 22:34–40). Currently, we face ecological crises all around us. Can we adhere to the command to “love our neighbors as ourselves” without caring for the environment in which they live?³⁴²³

Our desire to love and honor the Lord affects the way we interact with what he created. God calls his people to align ourselves with his plans (Rom 12:1–2; Col 1:9–10).³⁴²⁴ Since the Lord intends to redeem creation rather than to annihilate it, this has profound implications for how we view and care for the environment. We must seek to limit the damage we inflict upon both the inorganic and the living creation by behaving in ways which anticipate the age to come.³⁴²⁵

As co-heirs with Christ, our destiny conforms to his image (Rom 8:29). By the power of the Holy Spirit, the Lord calls and enables us to live as he originally intended for those created in his image (Gal 5:13–25).³⁴²⁶ Thus, we must seek that his “will [be done] on earth as [it is] in heaven” (Matt 6:9–10). God commissioned Adam and Eve with cultivating and serving what he had created (Gen 2:15, 18). Now that charge extends to us (Ps 8:5–10).³⁴²⁷

³⁴¹⁸John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 564–5.

³⁴¹⁹Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66*, 16.

³⁴²⁰Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 471.

³⁴²¹Schreiner, *Romans*, 437.

³⁴²²Ciampa Roy E., “Paul’s Theology of the Gospel,” in *Paul as Missionary: Identity, Activity, Theology, and Practice* (ed. Trevor J. Burke and Brian S. Rosner; London: T & T Clark, 2011), 187.

³⁴²³Moo, “Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” 458–60, http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/49/49-3/JETS_49-3_449-488_Moo.pdf.

³⁴²⁴Moo, “Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” 460, http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/49/49-3/JETS_49-3_449-488_Moo.pdf.

³⁴²⁵Hahne, “The Whole Creation has been Groaning,” 24–5, <http://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/106707.pdf>.

³⁴²⁶Moo, “Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” 459, http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/49/49-3/JETS_49-3_449-488_Moo.pdf.

³⁴²⁷Hahne, “The Whole Creation has been Groaning,” 25, <http://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/106707.pdf>.

Even as in first century Rome, we see the effects of sin almost everywhere we look: destruction, decay, and despair. As those who wait expectantly for the ushering in of the new age, we must fully engage ourselves in the advancement of the cause of Christ, seeking the righteousness, justice, and true life which God intended from the beginning.³⁴²⁸ Nevertheless, we must remain cognizant that, although they are not in vain, our own efforts cannot bring an end to the groaning around us: the Lord himself will accomplish that at the dawning of the age to come (Ps 96:7–16; Ps 98:4–9).³⁴²⁹

Read Rom 8:21–22. What clues did Paul give to indicate that the Lord will not destroy this world? Why does God plan to renew our planet? How does knowing that the Lord desires to renew the earth affect the way you live? What are some specific things you can do differently to enhance your care for the environment?

³⁴²⁸ Ciampa, “Genesis 1–3 and Paul’s Theology of Adam’s Dominion in Romans 5–6,” 113.

³⁴²⁹ Moo, “Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” 460, http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/49/49-3/JETS_49-3_449-488_Moo.pdf.