

The New Heavens and New Earth of 2 Peter 3:13

© Evert van Voorthuizen, October 2026.

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Bible Versions

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Other versions: See footnote 1.¹

(Note: All underlining of Scripture quotations for emphasis has been added by the author.)

The following article was written in response to a sermon on 2 Peter 3, presented on 4th October 2026 at the church attended by the author. The sermon presented the usual futurist perspective on the Judgment and the coming new heavens and new earth.

This article was emailed to the church's senior pastor.

Needless to say, the response received did not properly address the Scriptural issues raised in this article.

Peter's expectations

That Peter expected certain important events to transpire in the near future is evident from his first epistle:

1 Peter 1:7, 13:

The "revelation of Jesus Christ" was imminent.

This would include the revelation of his heavenly glory (1Pet 4:13; cf. 5:1).

1 Peter 4:5:

But they will have to give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

1 Peter 4:7:

The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear-minded and sober, so that you can pray.

1 Peter 4:17:

For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who disobey the gospel of God?

Greek text: τὸ κρίμα (*to krima*) = THE Judgment. This is an anaphoric article which points the reader back to a judgment already mentioned — that of the living and the dead in 1 Peter 4:5.

The following Bible translations include the definite article:

CJB, Darby, DLNT, GW, JUB, LEB, NABRE, NCB, NEB, NOG, YLT.

¹ Other Bible versions employed:

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The scoffers of 2 Peter 3:3-4

These are first-century scoffers that Peter's readers would soon encounter.

They will be **Jewish scoffers**:

"the fathers" (in 3:4, KJV) is a reference to their Israelite forefathers of the Old Testament.

They will scoff at the promise of Jesus' "coming" — his *Parousia* (3:4).

More specifically, they will mock Jesus' promise to come in judgment against them and their city and temple.

As part of their witness, early Christians incessantly warned their Jewish opponents that Jesus would return as their judge. They reminded them of his promises in Matthew 23:35-39; 24:2, 15-21 — that Jesus would return to judge "this generation" (Mt 23:36; 24:34). But with 30+ years having transpired and with life continuing on as normal, the scoffers would become emboldened in their opposition. They would claim that Jesus was a fraud — certainly no Messiah, for he had failed to fulfill his promise.

The first Christians knew full well that Jesus had promised to return in their generation, and that he would bring vindication and relief from persecution for them but judgment on their opponents.

See Luke 21:28; 2 Thessalonians 1:4-10; Revelation 3:9.

The "elements" (*stoicheia*) of 2 Peter 3:10, 12

The term *stoicheia* refers to **the elements, rudiments, primary and fundamental principles of any art, science, or discipline**.² They are the ABCs if you like — the basic or elementary principles of something.

The term can refer to the basic constituents or building blocks of the created order.

However, the NT usage relates to religion and perhaps to worldly philosophy.

In Hebrews 5:12 *stoicheia* denotes the elementary truths of God's word.

In Galatians 4:3 and 4:9 *stoicheia* refers to aspects of the Mosaic Law that the Judaizers sought to impose.

The *stoicheia* of Colossians 2:8 and 2:20 include circumcision, food laws, sabbaths, and other festivals that have all been fulfilled in Christ (Col 2:11-17). Asceticism and angel worship (Col 2:18), along with qualms about handling and tasting and touching things (Col 2:21), were also part of the Judaizing mix.

These outward practices are called *elements* because they belonged to an elementary and preparatory system of religious teaching — the Mosaic Law or Sinaitic Covenant. The Old Covenant's rituals served a didactic purpose but had now passed their use-by date (Gal 4:1-10; Heb 8:13). Peter is clearly anticipating the fiery destruction of Jerusalem and its temple that would transpire within a few years of his writing.

Everything in the temple (its furniture, genealogical records, etc.) was destroyed. The Jewish priesthood and sacrificial system were terminated. That was God's judgment, for they all stood in blasphemous denial of Jesus' work.

That Peter is referring to the events of AD 70 has been known and advocated by competent theologians since the 17th century.

² This is one of the definitions given for the noun *stoicheion* (Strong's G4747) on the Bible Hub website: <https://biblehub.com/greek/4747.htm>. (Originally from Thayer's Greek Lexicon.)

The Final Judgment was to transpire in the 1st century

Malachi 4:5-6:

⁵ *"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome Day of the LORD.*

⁶ *And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers. Otherwise, I will come and strike the land with a curse."*

Elijah would come before the day of judgment.

"Elijah" did come and Herod killed him (Mt 17:10-13).

John the Baptist continued in his own preaching the judgment message of Malachi — see Matthew 3:7-12.

The great and awesome Day of the Lord has been and gone — in AD 70.

Matthew 16:27-28:

²⁷ *"For the Son of Man will come in His Father's glory with His angels, and then He will repay each one according to what he has done.*

²⁸ *Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."*

The judgment of 16:27 is the same as the Sheep and Goats Judgment of Matthew 25:31-46.

We have in both judgments Jesus' return in glory with his angels (Mt 25:31).

"Coming in His kingdom" (Mt 16:28) is the same as sitting on "the throne of his glory" (Mt 25:31, KJV).

In both Judgments, Jesus repays people for what they have done.

This also proves that Jesus' promise in Matthew 24:34 applies to the entire Olivet Discourse.

Hebrews 10:25:

Let us not neglect meeting together, as some have made a habit, but let us encourage one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

James 5:7-9:

⁷ *Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. ...*

⁸ *You, too, be patient and strengthen your hearts, because the Lord's coming is near.*

⁹ *Do not complain about one another, brothers, so that you will not be judged.*

Look, the Judge is standing at the door!

Revelation 22:10-12:

¹⁰ *Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of prophecy in this book, because the time is near.*

¹¹ *Let the unrighteous continue to be unrighteous, and the vile continue to be vile; let the righteous continue to practice righteousness, and the holy continue to be holy."*

¹² *"Behold, I am coming soon, and My reward is with Me, to give to each one according to what he has done."*

Judgment when John wrote (ca. 64 AD) was imminent, and to all intents it was too late for people to change. Judgment would take people as it found them.

John, in **Revelation 20:11-15**, is shown the Resurrection and Judgment of the Dead.

These entailed Death and Hades (the intermediate abodes) releasing their inmates.

In Revelation 1:18 Jesus declares his possession of the keys of Death and Hades, and he is about to use those keys. The Resurrection was something about to transpire when John saw and wrote (Rev 1:1, 3; 22:6, 10).

The Resurrection did not entail the raising up of physical bodies from graves, but rather the release of “souls” from Hades (cf. Rev 6:9; 20:4).

Jesus has opened heaven for us

Today, post-AD 70, judgment befalls us immediately at death (Heb 9:27; 2Cor 5:10), and people enter into their final reward immediately (heaven or the lake of fire). No more waiting in Paradise or Hades.

We are clothed with our new immortal body immediately when we die.

We see this in 2 Corinthians 5:1-10, where Paul expresses a desire not to be found “naked” or “unclothed” (i.e., disembodied) when he dies (5:3-4). He’s clearly hoping to live until the Resurrection.

He wants to be reclothed immediately at death, which would only be the case if he lived until the Resurrection.

Nor do we at some future time leave the bliss of heaven to be reunited with our former bodies.

Our earthly bodies completely decay away and their constituent atoms are recycled.

(Jesus alone was promised that his body would not decay; he was raised physically for evidential purposes.)

A proper exegesis of 1 Corinthians 15 shows that we receive a wholly new body suited to the heavenly realm.

Yes, there will be considerable continuity of form with our earthly bodies, but (thankfully) they will not be the self-same bodies we have in this world.

Furthermore, heaven (the abode of God and the angels) is our final destiny, not some renewed physical realm.

The New Creation

Peter refers to the “promise” of new heavens and a new earth (2Pet 3:13).

He is referring to the promise found in Isaiah 65:17ff.

In Isaiah’s New Creation people work and procreate, and they also die, albeit at a great age (Isa 65:20-23).

In Revelation 21 – 22 sinners dwell in the New Creation, though outside the New Jerusalem itself (22:14-15).

The gospel invitation is extended to them by the Spirit and the Bride (Rev 22:17).

The Bride is the Church, the people of God (Ephesians 5).

The city’s wall is built on 12 foundations on which are the names of the 12 apostles (Rev 21:14). This speaks of the apostles’ teaching that defines and guards and protects the Church (cf. Eph 2:20).

What John describes is Jerusalem transformed, in fulfillment of OT prophecy. (John’s description borrows extensively from Isaiah 60, which concerns the glory of restored Zion).

The city serves as a light to the nations and proffers gospel healing to them (Rev 21:24; 22:2).

The New Creation depicts the new post-70 AD world order, with the kingdom of God having come “in power” (Mk 9:1; cf. Rev 11:15; Mt 16:28; Lk 21:31).

“Where righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13)

Jesus has brought the age of righteousness.

The Jews divided history into two ages: “this age”, and “the age to come”.

We see this in Matthew 12:32, and also in the disciples’ question in the Olivet Discourse.

The disciples there ask Jesus about the temple’s destruction (Mt 24:3):

“Tell us,” they said, “when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?”

The disciples want to know when he will return to conclude the (then) present age and usher in the messianic age and kingdom.

William Barclay comments:

Some verses [of Matthew 24] paint pictures taken from the Jewish conception of the Day of the Lord. ... The Jews divided all time into two ages — this present age, and the age to come. The present age is wholly bad and beyond all hope of human reformation. It can be mended only by the direct intervention of God. When God does intervene, the golden age, the age to come, will arrive. But in between the two ages there will come the Day of the Lord, which will be a time of terrible and fearful upheaval, like the birth-pangs of a new age.³

Cornelis Vanderwaal similarly comments on the disciples’ question in Matthew 24:3:

The end of the age. What the disciples actually asked Jesus was: “What will be the sign of your coming (*parousia*) and the close of the age?” (24:3). They spoke not of the *world’s* ending but of the end of the *age*, by which they meant the age that would come before the time of the Messiah’s appearance. The Messiah would bring the “coming age,” the last days.⁴

When Peter wrote that “the end of all things is near” (1Pet 4:7), he was referring to the conclusion of the old age. The messianic age was about to intrude. Jesus himself declared in Mark 9:1:

“Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God arrive with power.”

The kingdom came with irresistible power when Jesus returned to deal with his (and his people’s) enemies:

The Beast (= Nero and his inquisition), the Harlot (= Jerusalem and the Jews), Satan, and Hades (= Death).

All this is shown in detail in the book of Revelation, which is John’s extended version of the Olivet Discourse.

The new creation is therefore to be identified with the messianic kingdom foretold in the OT prophets.

The OT anticipates Messiah’s righteous rule in Psalm 72; Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1-10; 32:1-4; 42:1-7; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Ezekiel 36:24-28; and many other places.

The messianic age is characterized by **ever-increasing righteousness**.

³ William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 2* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1957). Via the Bible Portal website: <https://bibleportal.com/commentary/chapter/william-barclay/matthew/24>.

⁴ Cornelis Vanderwaal, *Search the Scriptures* (St. Catharines, Ontario: Paideia Press, 1978), Volume 7: Matthew-Luke. Page 52. Vanderwaal applies Matthew 16:28, all of Matthew 24 – 25, and Matthew 26:64 to Jesus’ first-century coming in judgment against the Jews. Vanderwaal served as a minister in several Reformed churches and wrote many works on exegesis, prophecy, ecumenism, and church history.

We see this in Isaiah 9:6-7:

⁶ *For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government will be upon His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

⁷ *Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish and sustain it with justice and righteousness from that time and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of Hosts will accomplish this.*

These words are echoed in the Annunciation to Mary (Luke 1:32-33):

³² *"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, ³³ and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever. His kingdom will never end!"*

We are now in this never-ending messianic kingdom, with its ever-increasing righteousness.

This is the new creation that Isaiah foretold, and that Peter and John describe as being imminent.

How are the kingdom promises fulfilled and righteousness extended?

Not by some future divine intervention, but **through the gospel**.

Jesus wins the nations through the gospel.

And win them he will!

Jesus cannot reign on the earth

Jesus cannot reign on the earth — either in a millennial kingdom or on a renewed earth.

The curse placed on Jehoiachin (in Jeremiah 22:30) precludes Jesus from reigning on a throne in Jerusalem.

Messiah's reign was always to be from God's right hand in heaven — from the heavenly Zion (Psalms 2 and 110; also Daniel 7:13-14, which shows Jesus' ascension and heavenly coronation).

Nor can he serve as a priest on earth, since he derives from the tribe of Judah rather than Levi.

But he is our King and Priest "forever" (Psalm 110), which means the earth must continue on, if not literally forever, certainly for a very long time — tens or hundreds of thousands of years at a minimum.

Sinners on earth will always need an intercessory high priest.

"With the Lord ... a thousand years are like a day" (2 Peter 3:8)

Yes, of course God's sense of time is different from ours. He is outside of time.

But that is NOT Peter's point.

Peter's point is this (in the words of J.S. Russell):

the promise which falls due in a day will be performed punctually, and the promise which falls due in a thousand years will be performed with equal punctuality. Length of time makes no difference to Him.

This verse (2Pet 3:8) is often misused in order to completely disregard scriptural time indicators.

Russell's words again:

Yet it is not unusual to quote these words as an argument or excuse for the total disregard of the element of time in the prophetic writings. Even in cases where a certain time is specified in the prediction, or where such limitations as 'shortly,' or 'speedily,' or 'at hand' are expressed, the passage before us is appealed to in justification of an arbitrary treatment of such notes of time, so that *soon* may mean *late*, and *near* may mean *distant*, and *short* may mean *long*, and vice versa.

When it is pointed out that certain predictions must, according to their own terms, be fulfilled within a limited time, the reply is, 'One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.' Thus we find an eminent critic committing himself to such a statement as the following: 'The apostles for the most part wrote and spoke of [the Parousia] as soon to appear, not, however, without many and sufficient hints of an interval, and that no short one, first to elapse.' Another, alluding to St. Paul's prediction in 2 Thessalonians 2, remarks that 'it tells us that while the coming of the Lord was then near, it was also remote.' These are specimens of what passes for exegesis in not a few commentators of high repute.⁵

On three separate occasions Jesus promised to return in that generation

Matthew 10:23:

"When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next. Truly I tell you, you will not reach all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes."

Matthew 16:28:

"Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

Matthew 24:34:

"Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have happened."

This includes Jesus' "coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." (Mt 24:30)

All three promises are prefixed by "Truly I tell you, ..."

This prefix indicates that what follows is of vital importance; it's often the key to a correct interpretation of a passage.

Therefore, what Jesus says is not to be undermined or circumvented by theories of double fulfillment, so that one can claim there was a first-century fulfillment but the "real fulfillment" is yet to come.

Double fulfillment was a feature of OT prophecy; that feature belonged to the age of "types" and "shadows" and "mysteries" but is almost certainly NOT a feature of NT prophecy. In Jesus and the NT Scriptures God has spoken to us clearly and definitively.

Nor are we to split the Olivet Discourse into AD 70 and end-of-the-world sections.

The *Parousia* of Matthew 24:3, 24:27, 24:37, and 24:39 is one and the same throughout and refers to Jesus' one and only Second Coming — in AD 70.

⁵ Both citations here are from *The Parousia*. Author: James Stuart Russell. Published in 1878, with a 2nd edition in 1887. The entire work is available online via the Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/details/parousiacritical00russ/mode/2up>.

NT Expectations

Each NT author without exception expected Jesus to return in that generation.

Outside the gospels:

Paul in **1 Thessalonians 4:15, 17**:

¹⁵ *By the word of the Lord, we declare to you that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who have fallen asleep.*

¹⁷ *After that, we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds ...*

Some of those to whom Paul wrote would remain until Jesus' coming (his *Parousia*, 4:15).

The author of **Hebrews in 10:37** (HCSB):

For yet in a very little while, the Coming One will come and not delay.

James 5:7-9:

⁷ *Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. ...*

⁸ *You, too, be patient and strengthen your hearts, because the Lord's coming is near.*

⁹ *Do not complain about one another, brothers, so that you will not be judged.*

Look, the Judge is standing at the door!

James' intended first-century readers are told to be patient until Jesus comes.

Likewise for the believers in Thyatira and Philadelphia — see below.

1 Peter 4:7:

The end of all things is near. ...

1 John 2:18:

Children, it is the last hour; and just as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have appeared. This is how we know it is the last hour.

In the book of Revelation, Jesus repeatedly promises to come soon:

Revelation 2:25 (to Thyatira):

"Nevertheless, hold fast to what you have until I come."

Revelation 3:11 (to Philadelphia):

"I am coming soon. Hold fast to what you have, so that no one will take your crown."

In chapter 22 Jesus promises to come "soon" three times (22:7, 12, 20).

To claim that 2000 years is "soon" is absurd.

In summary, the NT consistently teaches a first-century Parousia.

Whether that's Jesus' promises in the Gospels, or the statements of the NT writers.

That teaching and assumption is on virtually every page of the New Testament.

I find it disappointing that the Christian Church does not agree with the NT on this important matter.

The implication is that Jesus has not kept his promises and that the NT writers were mistaken.

But they were not mistaken. Jesus did return as he promised.

These truths have great apologetic value — they prove that Jesus was who he claimed to be.

The scoffers were wrong. Judgment came upon them.

The Church, too, needs to stop denying Jesus' coming. It needs to take his word at face value.