

Promises, Promises

2 Peter 3:8-13 April 19, 2026

Are you good at keeping your promises? Some of you may be in a promise debt right now. All of us who are married are in a promise debt to love and to cherish our spouses - a promise made to God and one He takes seriously (and we should, too).

Sometimes we make more specific promises. Shaquille O'Neal wanted to drop out of college and go to the NBA. To get his mother's permission, he *promised* he would finish his education one day.

Eight years later, he completed his bachelor's degree.¹ After another 12 years, he had earned a MBA and a doctorate in education.²

A promise kept after 20 years is pretty good. But Benjamin Franklin has Shaq beat. He kept a 200 year promise. In his will, Franklin donated \$2,000 each to Boston and Philadelphia. For the first 100 years, the money had to be invested and could only be used to make low-interest loans to young tradesmen. Then, after being invested for *another* 100 years the cities could use what had grown. In 1990, after 200 years of promise, Franklin's fund had grown to more than \$7 million.³

Our God is a *lavish* promise maker. Peter calls them "exceedingly great and precious promises."⁴ It's been estimated that God has made more than 7,400 promises to mankind.⁵ This text is all about the confidence we have that God *does* keep His promises. Especially His promise to return for us.

The trouble was that scoffers were prying their way into the Church and one of the *main* things they were teaching was that Jesus is never coming back. Now, we may not have that going on today, but even Christians can struggle with the timing of God and the fulfillment of His promises. We wonder how long the Lord really *will* wait before returning to establish His glorious Kingdom.

The Lord knows we have those struggles, and that's why the Holy Spirit inspired Peter to give us the comfort of these verses. But on top of comfort, this passage also gives us context *and* reiterates our calling as God's people, inheritors of God's promises.

2 Peter 3:8 - ⁸ Dear friends, don't overlook this one fact: With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.

The argument of the false teachers and scoffers was that things have stayed the same for centuries, and that means life will never change. Peter used the first part of this chapter to prove that wrong, but it does leave us with the question of, "Why *does* the Lord take so long from our perspective?"

¹ <https://www.espn.com/nba/news/2000/1211/938613.html>

² <https://jbhe.com/2012/05/dr-shaq-makes-good-on-a-promise-to-his-mother/>

³ Walter Isaacson *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life*

⁴ 2 Peter 1:4 (NKJV)

⁵ <https://ihconvention.com/gods-promises/>

Peter answers on several levels. He starts with how God *relates* to time. He says, with the Lord, a thousand years is like a day and a day is like a thousand years." Now, this isn't a conversion table, it's a simile. Peter is adapting what we read in Psalm 90. *There* the idea is even *more* dramatic: "In Your sight a thousand years are like yesterday that passes by, like a few hours of the night."

God does not relate to time the way we do. That isn't to say God doesn't care about timing. He does. I know I have said before God is outside of space and time. And God *is* eternal and He created time - He's not bound by it the way we are - but God *does* relate to time. We know that because of verses like Romans 5:6 and 1 Timothy 2:6 that say Jesus died at *just the right time*. God is going to *keep* relating to time in the future. In Revelation 8 we're told that, when the seventh seal is opened, there is silence in heaven for about half an hour.⁶ And in the very last chapter of the Bible, as John shows us a glimpse of eternity, we're told that months are measured in heaven.⁷

Now listen: God saying that to Him a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like a day isn't a cop out. Sometimes when we don't want to keep a promise, what do we say? "I'll do it later."

But we're talking about a large scale God doing a large scale work. What's the old saying? "Rome wasn't built in a day." The redemption of the world isn't done in a day or a year or a decade. I for one am glad the Lord wasn't so hasty to finish His work that He wrapped it up in 33 AD or 1,000 AD or 1982 AD. God *relates* to time differently than we do, but His timing is careful and purposeful.

2 Peter 3:9 - ⁹ The Lord does not delay his promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance.

Peter moves from talking about how God *relates* to time to talking about God's desire to *reconcile*. From the human perspective it seems like God has taken a long time, but that's not the way the Lord sees it. For Him, each day that passes compounds the wealth of redemption. Like Franklin's generous gift growing in size, so God's reconciliation grows day by day as more souls are saved.

It is not delay. It's patience. It's kindness. God's great goal is not to stop suffering but to save souls. In other words, His primary goal is life, not death. To save sinners from perishing. But that requires repentance and so often we humans are so slow to repent, aren't we?

God is holding the door open and says, "Hey, everyone! Come on through!" But sometimes we take these tiny little shuffle steps when the best thing we could do is *run* through.

Now, perhaps you're here and you're not a Christian - you've never believed in Jesus, repented of your sin, and obeyed His command to follow Him. The world is the way that it is because of *you*. God is holding the door *for you*. He's waiting because He's hoping that *you* will get saved. It is an incredibly kind, gracious, and generous thing God is doing for you.

⁶ Revelation 8:1

⁷ Revelation 22:2

But listen: In Romans 2, the Apostle Paul puts a very direct point on it for you:

Romans 2:4-5 - ⁴ Do you despise the riches of his kindness, restraint, and patience, not recognizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance? ⁵ Because of your hardened and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment is revealed.

So, repent! To repent means to change your mind. To turn to God from your idols. To trust Him.

When Peter uses the term "perish," he doesn't mean physical death. He means eternal judgment.⁸ So is he suggesting that, in the end, *everyone* will be saved? Does verse 9 teach universalism?

The answer is a clear no. After all, Peter has spent the rest of his book warning the false teachers *and their followers* that they're in imminent danger of eternal damnation. The sad fact of the matter is that, in *this* regard, God does not get what He wants. He *wants* everyone to be saved, but love cannot be forced, and so He does not force us to follow Him.

2 Peter 3:10 - ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief; on that day the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, the elements will burn and be dissolved, and the earth and the works on it will be disclosed.

The previous house we lived in was burgled by thieves on two separate occasions. I can tell you, the coming of a thief is *quite* unpredictable.

Jesus also said His coming is like a thief. Now, if you're a Christian, you still don't know when He's coming, but He comes not as a thief, but as the Bridegroom to whisk His beloved home.

When Peter says "the heavens" in this verse, he doesn't mean where God lives, but the created heavens - stars and space.⁹ When God finally judges the cosmos, all created matter is going to melt in a cataclysmic eruption of fire. Peter means for the image to be terrifying,¹⁰ because God's furious wrath *is* terrifying. But this final judgment is necessary to punish sin and purify creation. In fact, Peter uses a medical term that Greek doctors used to describe the burning heat of a fever.¹¹

For unbelievers, the loud noise will be of carnage and desolation. But you know, that term was *also* used of the sound of a shepherd's pipe.¹² Remember, Christ's coming is not only to destroy the wicked, but to *deliver* His people. The Good Shepherd, calling His sheep to the greenest pasture.

⁸ Thomas Schreiner *The New American Commentary, Volume 37: 1, 2 Peter, Jude*

⁹ D. Edmond Hiebert *Second Peter And Jude*

¹⁰ Dick Lucas & Christopher Green *The Message Of 2 Peter & Jude*

¹¹ Hiebert

¹² Robertson Nicoll *The Expositor's Greek Testament: Commentary Vol. 5, Liddle Scott-Jones Definitions*

2 Peter 3:11-12 - ¹¹ **Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, it is clear what sort of people you should be in holy conduct and godliness** ¹² **as you wait for the day of God and hasten its coming. Because of that day, the heavens will be dissolved with fire and the elements will melt with heat.**

Peter began this section by giving us context to why God's promise has taken so long to be fulfilled. We're *still* waiting. But first we've seen that God *relates* to time differently than we do. And then second, God is waiting out of His patient desire to *reconcile* as many people as are willing.

But now we have this third layer. And here we learn that we - you and I - have *responsibility* because we are part of the fulfillment of God's work. Peter reminds us of our calling as disciples and reminds us that when we live out our faith, *that* hastens the fulfillment of God's promise.

How? First, we can hasten Christ's coming by *being* people who repent. Repentance isn't only for unbelievers. And it isn't a one-and-done thing. Christians - what do we have to repent of today? There's *something*. Five of the seven churches in Revelation are told to repent.

Our obedience and repentance accelerates God's work and our refusal decelerates God's work. Consider the example of Lot. He kept lingering in Sodom. He wouldn't leave, even when the angel told him to. He held to his materialism and worldliness hour after hour. And finally, at one point, the angel said, "You have to RUN, because I can't do anything until you get to safety."¹³

We also hasten the Lord's coming is by helping *others* repent and receive salvation. We preach the Gospel. We move through the world as living testimonies of Who God is and all He has said.

Since we want to be a part of God's work, since we want to hasten the return of Christ, since we know the truth of what is going to happen in the future, the only way for us to live is in holy conduct and Godliness. Actually, Peter used the plural forms of those words. He said, "It is necessary for you [Christians] to live in holy *conducts* and *Godlinesses*."¹⁴

That adjustment to plural is, to me, very helpful. Because sometimes I hear, "You need to be Godly," and it can be hard to apply. Godliness means pleasing God¹⁵ and being Christlike. But Godlinesses reminds me that there are *all sorts* of things I can do every day to please God and to think and act like Jesus. In how I treat my wife, in how I treat my kids, in how I treat strangers, in how I do my work, in what I fill my mind with, in what choices and goals I aim at in life.

And as I remember the fact that all this world is going to be consumed, it should help me to not only have a proper perspective on what really matters, what will really last, but also give me an urgency to be about my Master's business, because not only is His return imminent, but Peter indicates in his verbiage that the breakdown of the universe is *already* underway.¹⁶ And just as I

¹³ Genesis 19:22

¹⁴ Douglas Moo *The NIV Application Commentary: 2 Peter, Jude*

¹⁵ Hiebert

¹⁶ J.N.D. Kelly *The Epistles Of Peter And Of Jude*

would not sign a mortgage for a building that's actively on fire, so I should not give my heart and life to worldly, temporal pursuits that will all be gone one day.

2 Peter 3:13 - ¹³ But based on his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

We're not excited to see this world burn. We're excited for what comes next. As Abraham looked forward to the city whose Builder and Maker is God,¹⁷ so we love and long for Christ's Kingdom.

In this world, so much of life is trying to make things a little better. Trying to hold back the effects of sin on our health, on society, on relationships. But Christ's Kingdom is not just better, it is *best*. And what is best of all is that in it righteousness dwells. Meaning not only will society not be corrupt and our bodies not break down, but more importantly, The Lord our Righteousness will be there. He dwells with us, face to face, in the new heavens and new earth. "New" here is a term that speaks not just new in time, but new in quality. Fresh. No blemish or contamination of any kind.¹⁸ And there, our righteous King will wipe away every tear from our eyes. He will dwell with us and we with Him.

This is not just a theory or the hope of some religious zealot. This is a promise *backed by blood*. Jesus poured out His blood in a new covenant and by it guarantees the truth of this promise. One that is sure to come. One that is already being accomplished and cannot be stopped.

Are you a citizen of that Kingdom? Have you received salvation? You can know you have if the Holy Spirit dwells in your heart. The Holy Spirit is given by God to those who are born again as a *down payment* guaranteeing all His promises.¹⁹ If you haven't received it, repent. Turn to God. Be saved.

For those who *are* Christians here today, hopefully you have been comforted by the spiritual context Peter gives in these verses. But don't forget the responsibility of your calling.

It's interesting: In 1990 when Benjamin Franklin's trust fund was set to be liquidated, Boston had \$5 million dollars waiting. Philadelphia had less than half that much. \$2.3 million. Why? They started with the same amount. They had been given the same promise. It was a matter of management. Misallocation of what they had been given.

Christians, we have been given *everything* we need for life and Godliness. Which means we have the power and equipment necessary to *hasten* the return of Jesus to redeem the universe. These truths make it *clear* what sort of lives we should lead. Are we living out our faith? It's clear what the Lord is going to do in the future. It's clear what He wants done in the present. Let's be people of repentance and participants in Christ's work of redemption, doing His business till He comes.

¹⁷ Hebrews 11:10

¹⁸ Hiebert

¹⁹ 2 Corinthians 1:20-22