

## God Is Slow to Anger

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Glory: The Character of God / God's Longsuffering; Patience; Judgment; Second Coming / Exodus 34:6-7; 2 Peter 3:1-13

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## Introduction

I am currently preaching a series of sermons that I am calling, "Glory: The Character of God." In this five-week-long series, I am exploring God's self-revelation of himself to Moses in [Exodus 34:6-7](#).

God revealed several of his attributes to Moses in [Exodus 34:6-7](#), which reads as follows:

<sup>6</sup> The LORD passed before him [that is, Moses] and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, <sup>7</sup> keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

Last week, we examined the truth that God is merciful and gracious.

Today, I would like to look at the truth that God is slow to anger. This has to do with God's patience and longsuffering. It is particularly seen in the way in which God will bring about a day of judgment.

Therefore, I would like to examine a very important passage regarding the coming judgment of God in the Second Letter of Peter.

## Scripture

Let's read [2 Peter 3:1-13](#):

<sup>1</sup> This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, <sup>2</sup> that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, <sup>3</sup> knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. <sup>4</sup> They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.” <sup>5</sup> For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, <sup>6</sup> and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. <sup>7</sup> But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

<sup>8</sup> But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. <sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. <sup>10</sup> But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

<sup>11</sup> Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, <sup>12</sup> waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! <sup>13</sup> But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

## Lesson

In [2 Peter 3:1-13](#), we learn that though God is slow to anger, a day of judgment is coming.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Reminder Regarding the Day of Judgment (3:1-7)
2. Reasons for the Delay of the Day of Judgment (3:8-10)

### 3. Response to the Day of Judgment (3:11-13)

## I. Reminder Regarding the Day of Judgment (3:1-7)

First, let's look at the reminder regarding the day of judgment.

The Apostle Peter wrote two letters to Christians who were scattered throughout the Roman Empire. The Christians were being persecuted for their faith in Jesus. Peter encouraged them to stand strong in the face of difficulty, trial, and persecution. Peter was reminding his readers regarding the coming day of judgment.

As he came to the end of his Second Letter, Peter focused on those who scoffed at Christ's Second Coming. He wrote in verses 1-4:

<sup>1</sup> This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, <sup>2</sup> that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, <sup>3</sup> knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. <sup>4</sup> They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."

Commentators believe that Peter wrote this letter shortly before his death by crucifixion in about 67 - 68 AD. So, not quite 40 years after the crucifixion of Jesus, scoffers were already saying, "When is Jesus coming back again? Jesus lived and died and you all said that he was going to come back again. Well, we are still waiting."

Almost 2,000 later, we are still hearing the same refrain from scoffers, "When is Jesus coming back again? All things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."

People don't believe that God is going to break into history.

How did Peter answer the scoffers' charge? Peter cited several Old Testament examples to prove that God has broken into history in the past.

His first example that God has broken into history has to do with God's creation of the world. Peter said in verse 5, "For they [that is, the scoffers] deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God." When God created the world, nothing pre-existed the creation of the world. God created the entire cosmos out of nothing, that is, *ex nihilo* (as the theologians say).

Then, his second example that God has broken into history has to do with the worldwide flood. Peter went on to say in verse 6, "... and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished." People may say that it was a natural catastrophe. But the Bible insists that God was breaking into history in judgment and destroyed every living person and creature except for the eight souls on the ark, along with its cargo of animals and birds.

Do you remember how long it took Noah to build the ark? Well, the Bible doesn't state it exactly. But scholars estimate that it took somewhere between 20 and 75 years for Noah to build the ark. If you have been to the Ark Encounter Museum in Kentucky, you know that the Ark was a massive boat.

Imagine all the ridicule that Noah and his family endured for decades as he built the ark.

"Noah, what are you building?"

"An ark."

"What is that?"

"It is a big boat."

"Why are you building a big boat, Noah?"

"Because God told me to build it."

"Why did God tell you to build a big boat, Noah?"

"Because God said that he will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die" ([Genesis 6:17](#)).

People just scoffed and laughed at Noah. Week after week. Month after month. Year after year. Decade after decade.

Finally, Noah finished building the ark. God told him to go into the ark with his wife, his three sons, their wives, and pairs of all the animals and birds on the earth. God shut them into the ark.

Then it started raining. It rained for forty days and forty nights. Every person, animal, and bird that was not in the ark perished in that great, worldwide flood.

This example brought Peter to remind his readers regarding the coming day of judgment in which God will once again dramatically break into history. Peter said in verse 7, “But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.”

Today, people may scoff at the coming day of judgment. But just as surely as it came in Noah’s day, it will come one day in the future.

So, let me ask you: are you ready for the coming day of judgment?

## II. Reasons for the Delay of the Day of Judgment (3:8-10)

Second, let’s notice some reasons for the delay of the day of judgment.

There are many reasons for the delay of the day of judgment. But let me mention just three.

### **A. The Lord Is Not Like Us (3:8)**

The first reason for the delay of the day of judgment is that the Lord is not like us.

Peter wrote in verse 8, “But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” Peter was paraphrasing [Psalm 90:4](#) where Moses said of God, “For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.”

God created time. His time is not the same as our time. We look at history in terms of years, decades, and centuries. But, to God, time is always present.

The great Baptist preacher of the nineteenth century, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, once said:

Some stars are known as “double stars,” and with the strongest telescope, it seems impossible to discover any distance between them. They are all but joined; there are certain motions by which the astronomer perceives they are two stars and not one, but to the common observer they seem one. Even with the strongest telescope, we say, no distance is apparent between them; and yet it is perfectly certain that there may be millions and millions of miles of space between those two stars, but from the distance at which we stand, they resolve themselves into one (Charles Spurgeon, *300 Sermon Illustrations from Charles Spurgeon*, ed. Elliot Ritzema and Lynnea Smoyer [Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017]).

That is how God views our time. From the Fall of Adam until the redemption achieved by Jesus Christ at the cross at Calvary was several thousand years. But to God, who is far-seeing, the two events were almost rolled into one.

And from the resurrection of Christ until today, we have already had almost 2,000 years. And only God knows when the day of judgment will come.

So, let us realize that God does not measure time as we do. The first reason for the delay of judgment is that the Lord is not like us.

## **B. The Lord Is Patient Toward Us (3:9)**

The second reason for the delay of the day of judgment is that the Lord is patient toward us.

Peter wrote in verse 9, “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”

Is this not a great verse? God is delaying the day of judgment because he wants sinners to come to repentance. And yet, instead of realizing their great danger, many continue to scoff at God’s promise of the coming day of judgment.

Robert G. Ingersoll (1833 - 1899) was an American lawyer, writer, and orator. He was nicknamed “the Great Agnostic.” One time when Ingersoll was lecturing, he

once took out his watch and declared, “I will give God five minutes to strike me dead for the things I have said.”

The minutes ticked off as he held the watch and waited. In about four-and-a-half minutes, some women began fainting, but nothing happened.

When the five minutes were up, Ingersoll put the watch into his pocket.

When that incident reached the ears of the well-known preacher, Joseph Parker, he asked, “And did the gentleman think he could exhaust the patience of the Eternal God in five minutes?” (G. Curtis Jones, *1000 Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching* [Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1986], 146–147.2).

Friends, the day of judgment is certain. Let us not presume upon the patience of God.

### **C. The Lord Is Going to Surprise Us (3:10)**

And the third reason for the delay of the day of judgment is that the Lord is going to surprise us.

Peter wrote in verse 10, “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.”

Let’s suppose that when you got home this afternoon from worship, there was a note taped to your front door. You opened the note and it read, “This coming Tuesday at 11:30 p.m., I am going to come into your home and steal from you.”

Well, first you might think it is a joke that some friend is playing on you. But, I think on Tuesday evening you will probably make doubly sure that your home is properly locked. You might even offer to watch in your home your neighbor’s pit bulldog for the night. And you will probably make sure your handgun is loaded and ready to use at your bedside.

That is not of course how thieves work. They try to break into your home when you might least expect them to do so.

Peter said that the coming day of judgment is going to surprise us. It is going to happen when we least expect it. Therefore, we must always be ready for the coming day of judgment.

The story is told about a Scottish lawyer who hired a horse. Sadly, either through accident or ill usage, the animal died. Naturally, the horse's owner insisted on being paid its value, together with some compensation for the loss of its use.

The lawyer acknowledged his liability and said he was perfectly willing to pay, but at the moment he was a little tight for ready cash. Would the horse owner accept a promissory note?

"Certainly," he said.

Whereupon the lawyer further said that he must be allowed a long date.

"You can fix your own time," said the horse owner.

The lawyer then drew the note, making it payable on the Day of Judgment.

Eventually, the horse owner took the matter to court, and there, in defense, the lawyer asked the judge to look at the note.

The judge did so and then replied: "The promissory note is perfectly good sir and as this is a day of judgment, I decree that you pay today!" (Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* [Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996], 688).

Friends, a day is going to come when the Lord will return. And that day will be the day of judgment. It will come as a surprise to many. Let it not be a surprise to you.

### III. Response to the Day of Judgment (3:11-13)

And third, let's observe our response to the day of judgment.

In the early days of Colonial America, May 19, 1780, stands out. Why? It stands out because May 19, 1780, has become known for its foreshadowing of the coming day of judgment.



At noon on May 19, 1780, the skies were turned from blue to gray, and by mid-afternoon, they had become so black that men fell on their knees and cried out to God for mercy before they went to their doom.

On that day, the Connecticut House of Representatives was in session. When darkness fell by day, some began to shout and plead for mercy. Others demanded an immediate adjournment.

The speaker of the House, Colonel Abraham Davenport, called for silence. Then he spoke: “The Day of Judgment is either approaching or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for adjournment. If it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. I wish, therefore, that candles be brought” (Andrew W. Blackwood, *Expository Preaching for Today* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1975], 112).

Colonel Davenport wanted to be found doing his duty when the day of judgment came.

What did Peter propose to his readers about how to respond to the coming day of judgment? He wrote in verses 11-13, “Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”

Peter’s counsel to his readers was to live lives of holiness and godliness. That is one way of saying that we must prepare to meet God.

One pastor writes that if a person wants to be a doctor, he doesn’t wake up one day and say, “I want to be a doctor,” and then start practicing. That decision to be a doctor would have been made years in advance. That decision would have determined what college he went to and would have required years of commitment to make it through an internship and residency. In other words, a person doesn’t become a doctor the day he decides that a medical career is what he wants to pursue. The decision about direction requires a process.

A person doesn’t just wake up one day and say, “I’m going to be a lawyer,” and then start trying cases the same afternoon. A decision has to be made long in advance of taking on clients.

For any professional career, some requirements must be met to enjoy the benefits of that decision. A career requires an investment of time and energy before it becomes a reality.

Some of us have retirement accounts and IRAs because we are planning for sixty-five and beyond. You don't wake up at sixty-five and say, "Let me start a retirement plan." That decision is made in advance so that when you arrive at sixty-five, you have something laid aside.

Some of us, perhaps, may be saving for our children's education. You don't wake up on the day of their high school graduation and say, "I'd better put something aside for their education." That decision has to be made in advance.

The point is that the knowledge of the future controls activity in the present. When you know where you are going, you will make decisions about what you must do now (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans' Book of Illustrations: Stories, Quotes, and Anecdotes from More than 30 Years of Preaching and Public Speaking* [Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009], 176–177).

There is a coming day of judgment. One that day, this entire world will be burned and dissolved. God will set up new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

And on that day of judgment, every person is going to have to stand before God and give an account of his or her life. On that day, it will be too late to make adjustments. Long before you and I stand before God, we need to make sure that we have made the right decision and prepared for that day.

So, if you are not a Christian, turn to Jesus in faith and repentance. Tell him that you are a sinner and deserve to go to hell for all eternity. Ask him to pay the penalty for all your sin.

If you are a Christian, live like one. Live a life of holiness and godliness and make your confession sure.

## Conclusion

So, let us be thankful that God is slow to anger. God is slow to anger to give us time to repent and come to him for salvation. Amen.