

A LIVING HOPE

A Catholic Journey Through the Letters of Saint Peter

Session Twelve

The Day of the Lord

2 Peter 3:1-18

“But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells”

2 Peter 3:13 (RSV2CE)

Saint Joseph Parish, Springfield, Nebraska

Leader Preparation Guide

For the facilitator only. Not for distribution.

Session Overview

The testament closes looking at the horizon. Scoffers ask the oldest sneer in apologetics: “Where is the promise of his coming?” (3:4). Peter answers with creation and flood (God has intervened before), with God’s clock (“one day is as a thousand years”), and with the stunning reframe of 3:9: the delay is not slowness but patience, God “not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.” Then the Day itself, arriving “like a thief,” dissolving the elements, and opening onto the promise the whole Bible has been driving toward: “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (3:13; Is 65:17). Along the way Peter calls Paul “our beloved brother,” ranks his letters with “the other scriptures,” and warns that the ignorant and unstable twist them, resolving Session Ten’s interpretation thread. The final verse of Peter’s final letter closes the study’s growth arc and the exile arc at once: “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Waiting well is the last lesson, and it turns out to be the first one wearing its crown: exiles, almost home.

The Discovery Aim. Participants should be able to say: the delay of the Second Coming is mercy with a purpose, and I am part of the purpose; the world ends not in annihilation but in refining unto renewal, a

new heavens and new earth; holiness, not date-setting, is the correct response to the end; and Peter and Paul, once publicly at odds, end as beloved brothers, martyred in the same city.

The Catholic Touchstone. God's universal salvific will (CCC 1037, 2822; 1 Tim 2:4); the renewal, not annihilation, of creation (CCC 1042-1047, quoting 2 Pet 3:13); vigilance without apocalyptic date-mania (CCC 673); and Scripture read within the Church against every twisting (CCC 85-87, resolving Session Ten).

What You Need to Know

The Scoffers' Argument (3:1-7)

"In the last days scoffers will come... saying, 'Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation.'" The argument is uniformitarian: nothing has ever interrupted the world, so nothing ever will. Peter answers that the premise is factually false, and "deliberately" so (3:5): the world was created by God's word out of water, and the same word once judged it by water in the flood. The universe has already been interrupted twice; those who missed it "deliberately ignore" the evidence. The flood, a type of baptism in Session Six and a precedent of judgment in Session Eleven, makes its third and final appearance as the proof that "it has never happened" is not true. And the next intervention is appointed: "the heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire" (3:7), the assayer's fire of the whole study now writ cosmic.

God's Clock and God's Heart (3:8-9)

Two answers to "why so long?" First, perspective: "with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (Ps 90:4): the Eternal is not late by a clock he transcends. Second, and greater, motive: "The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." The delay is mercy with a headcount: every year of history since the Ascension exists because God is holding the door. This is the New Testament's plainest statement of the universal salvific will alongside 1 Timothy 2:4 ("who desires all men to be saved"), and the Church builds on both (CCC 1037: God predestines no one to hell; CCC 2822). Handle the pastoral edge honestly: God's desire that all be saved and the real possibility of refusing him (Session Eleven) stand together; grace is resistible, and the door is genuinely open.

The Thief, the Fire, and What Survives (3:10-13)

"The day of the Lord will come like a thief": Jesus' own image (Mt 24:43), passed through Paul (1 Thess 5:2) and kept by Peter: unscheduled, certain, decisive. The elements dissolve "with fire," and in the RSV2CE "the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up" (3:10). The oldest manuscripts read "will be found," that is, laid bare and exposed to judgment, a variant many modern versions follow; either way, the Day discloses everything. Read the fire as the study has taught: the assayer's furnace (1 Pet 1:7; 4:12) at cosmic scale, destroying corruption to disclose and refine what is genuine, because the outcome is not nothing but "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (3:13, quoting Is 65:17; 66:22). Catholic eschatology is renewal, not annihilation: creation itself, groaning now, will be

set free and transfigured (Rom 8:19-22; Rev 21:1-5; CCC 1042-1047). The practical inference Peter draws twice is holiness: “what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness” (3:11), “be zealous to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace” (3:14). No date math; the letter's eschatology issues in ethics.

Our Beloved Brother Paul (3:14-16)

One of the New Testament's most touching sentences. Remember Antioch: Paul “opposed him to his face” publicly over table fellowship (Gal 2:11-14), and Paul wrote the account down for all posterity. Peter's last letter answers with: “our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him.” The corrected man canonizes his corrector: he ranks Paul's letters with “the other scriptures” (a striking New Testament witness that already places apostolic writings among the scriptures) even while admitting “there are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction.” Here Session Ten's interpretation thread resolves: inspired Scripture, Peter testifies, is twistable, and the remedy the letter has already supplied is stable, guided remembrance within the apostolic community (1:12-15; Acts 8:31). Within a generation, both men would be martyred in the same city; the Church celebrates them on one feast (June 29): the rock and the arrow, brothers at the end.

The Last Word: Grow (3:17-18)

“You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, beware lest you be carried away with the error of lawless men and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Beware and grow: vigilance (Session Eleven) and the ladder (Session Nine) in one farewell.

“Grow” is the last imperative Peter ever wrote; stability in his vocabulary is not standing still but growing in the right direction. The doxology, “To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity,” gives glory to Jesus Christ directly, one final quiet confession of the divinity announced in 1:1. The study ends where the exile thread lands: waiting for new heavens and a new earth is the exile's homesickness (1 Pet 1:1) turned to face the door.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Isaiah 65:17-19 and 66:22: The Promise Peter Quotes

“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered... I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.” Tonight's discovery (Q6): the group reads Isaiah's promise and finds it is not escape from creation but creation remade, with joy, city, and people in it. Revelation 21 completes the arc: the holy city descends; God dwells with men; death is no more.

Psalms 90:4: The Watchman's Clock

“For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.” Moses' psalm of God's eternity against human transience, quoted at 3:8. The God outside time is never late inside it.

Voices of the Church

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St. Irenaeus of Lyons (d. c. 202), *Against Heresies*, Book V, Chapter 36, Section 1

Against those who expected creation's abolition, St. Irenaeus teaches that neither the substance nor the essence of creation is annihilated, for he who established it is faithful and true; rather the fashion of this world passes away, and creation, renewed, will flourish in incorruption: new heavens and a new earth in which the righteous will dwell, as Isaiah and the apostles promised. Already within a century of this letter, a Father of the Church was reading it just this way: renewal, not destruction.

Voices of the Church

St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), *The City of God*, Book XX, Chapter 16

Treating the last things at length, St. Augustine teaches that in the conflagration of the world the qualities of the corruptible elements that suited our corruptible bodies will utterly perish by burning, while the substance itself will receive the properties that befit immortal bodies: the world, made new and better, fitted to humanity made new and better. His careful distinction, qualities burned, substance transfigured, is 2 Peter 3:10-13 read with a doctor's precision.

Voices of the Church

St. Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582), *the Bookmark Prayer*

Traditionally attributed to her, and by long tradition found written in her breviary after her death: let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you; all things are passing; God never changes; patience obtains all things; whoever has God lacks nothing; God alone suffices. It is the spirituality of 2 Peter 3 in six lines: the passing world held lightly, the unchanging God held fast, and patience, God's own virtue in 3:9, as the way to wait.

Catechism Connection

CCC 1042-1047. The universe itself will be renewed: the Church awaits “new heavens and a new earth” (2 Pet 3:13 quoted at CCC 1043), a mysterious renewal that will transfigure humanity and the world, in which the cosmos is restored to its original state in the service of the just.

CCC 673 and 1037. Since the Ascension, Christ's coming has been imminent, though it is not for us to know times or seasons; and God predestines no one to hell: he wills all to “reach repentance” (2 Pet 3:9 cited). Vigilance without date-setting; hope without presumption.

CCC 2822. The Father's will is “that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4); he is patient, “not wishing that any should perish.” Praying “thy will be done” enrolls us in the patience of 3:9.

Thread Watch: The Final Harvest

1. RESOLVED: Interpretation. 1:20-21 (Session Ten) meets 3:15-16: Scripture is inspired and twistable; the remedy is remembrance within the apostolic Church. Name it after Q7.

2. RESOLVED: Growth. The ladder of 1:5 (Session Nine) closes at 3:18: “grow in grace and knowledge,” Peter’s final imperative.

3. RESOLVED: Exile. From “exiles of the Dispersion” (1 Pet 1:1, Session One) to “we wait for new heavens and a new earth” (3:13): homesickness was the map all along. The last Send question closes the whole study here.

4. Completed: Fire and flood. The assayer’s fire (1 Pet 1:7; 4:12) goes cosmic at 3:7-13; the flood makes its third appearance (Session Six type, Session Eleven precedent, tonight proof).

Session Goals for the Leader

1. Reframe the delay as mercy with a headcount, and each participant as part of the reason.
2. Teach renewal, not annihilation, from Isaiah 65 and CCC 1043, against escapist eschatology.
3. Land the Peter-and-Paul reconciliation and resolve the interpretation thread at 3:15-16.
4. Close the study: harvest the threads aloud, and send the group out growing.

Leader Note

Time frame: 75 to 90 minutes, plus closing celebration if your group keeps that custom. If time runs short, Q2 and the Dig Deeper are the cuts; never cut Q4, Q6, Q7, or the final Send. Consider ending with the Litany-style closing prayer and St. Teresa’s bookmark read aloud together.

Discussion Guide

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Opening Prayer

Opening Prayer

Father of patience, who holds the door of mercy open and wishes that none should perish: as we finish these letters, fix our eyes on the new heavens and the new earth where righteousness dwells. Make us holy while we wait, and let us be found by you at peace. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win: Gathering In

- ◆ What is the longest you have ever waited for something that mattered: a diagnosis, an answer, a person? What did the waiting do to you, for better or worse?
- ◆ When you imagine “the end of the world,” what picture did you inherit, from movies, sermons, or childhood? Is it mostly frightening, mostly hopeful, or mostly blank?

Build: Working the Text

Leader Note

One-minute recap: the counterfeit teachers promise freedom and deliver chains. Tonight the true promise: the Day, the patience behind its delay, and the world made new. Final session: leave ten minutes at the end to harvest the whole study. Ask, wait, work, confirm.

Movement One: Answering the Scoffers (3:1-9)

Read: 2 Peter 3:1-9 (from participants' own Bibles)

- Q1.** Verse 4 records the scoffers' argument: “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation.” State their logic fairly (it is the same argument today, in labs and dorm rooms): what is the claim, and why does it feel strong? Then find Peter's factual rebuttal in verses 5-6: what two events do the scoffers “deliberately ignore”?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The claim: the universe is a closed, uninterrupted system; nothing has ever broken in, so nothing ever will; twenty centuries of delay is twenty centuries of evidence. It feels strong because ordinary experience is uniform. Peter's rebuttal attacks the premise: the world began by God's word (interruption one: creation itself) and was judged by water (interruption two: the flood). The system is not closed and never was; those who say “it has never happened” must deliberately ignore that, on the Bible's account, it has happened twice. Note the verb: the ignorance is chosen (“they deliberately ignore”), because an unintermittible world is a world with no appointments to keep.

- Q2.** Verse 8, quoting Psalm 90:4: “with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” What category mistake are the scoffers (and sometimes we) making about God and time? What does “late” even mean to the One who invented clocks?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The mistake is measuring the Eternal with a wristwatch: God is not inside time running behind schedule; time is inside God. “Late” is a concept for creatures with deadlines; the Author of history cannot miss a deadline he himself appointed and has not disclosed. Moses' psalm (90:4) was written by a man who waited forty years in a desert; he learned that God's pace and God's faithfulness are two different questions, and only the second one matters.

- Q3.** Verse 9 is the letter's most tender sentence: “The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.” Reframe the entire delay through this verse: why has every year since the Ascension happened? And make it personal: who exists, believes, or was baptized because the Lord did not come in 1950?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The delay is mercy with a headcount: God is holding the door for people who have not yet walked through it, and every year of history is populated by them. Everyone in the room is on the list: had the Day come a century ago, none of us, our conversions, our baptisms, our children, would exist. This is the New Testament's plainest window into God's heart alongside 1 Timothy 2:4: he “desires all men to be saved,” predestines no one to perdition (CCC 1037), and counts patience a better glory than punctuality. The sneer “Where is he?” and the answer “Waiting for you” pass each other in this verse. And it recruits us: the Church's mission is the reason for the meantime; we are not killing time before the end; we are the purpose of the extension.

Movement Two: The Day and the New World (3:10-14)

Read: 2 Peter 3:10-14 *(from participants' own Bibles)*

- Q4.** Verse 10: “The day of the Lord will come like a thief.” Peter got this image from Jesus himself (Mt 24:43-44). What does a thief's arrival have that a scheduled delivery does not, and what two opposite errors about the end does the image rule out?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

A thief is certain to profit only because he is unscheduled: no warning, no countdown, no time to arrange appearances. The image rules out date-setting (every calculated apocalypse in history has embarrassed its calculators; “it is not for you to know times or seasons,” Acts 1:7) and complacency (unscheduled is not the same as unreal; the thief does come). The correct posture is Jesus' own conclusion: “you also must be ready”, a readiness of state, not of schedule: live so that no arrival time would be a bad one.

- Q5.** Verses 10-12 describe fire dissolving the elements, and verse 13 gives the outcome: “we wait for new

heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.” This study has trained you on fire since week one (1 Pet 1:7; 4:12). What kind of fire has it always been, and what does that make the cosmic fire: a demolition or a refining? What survives an assayer’s furnace?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

It has always been the assayer’s fire: the furnace that destroys dross to disclose gold. Scaled to the cosmos, the Day is refining unto renewal, not annihilation unto nothing: qualities of corruption burn; the substance God called “very good” is transfigured for glory (so St. Augustine, City of God XX.16; so St. Irenaeus: creation is not abolished but renewed, and the fashion of this world passes away). What survives any assayer’s fire is what was genuine, which is why Peter immediately pivots to “what sort of persons ought you to be”: the only preparation for a refining fire is to be gold.

- Q6.** Peter is quoting a promise. Turn to Isaiah 65:17-19 and read it aloud. List what is in Isaiah’s new creation: what gets created, what is forgotten, what fills the city, and how does God himself feel in verse 19? Now test the popular picture: is the Christian hope an escape from creation to a disembodied elsewhere, or something else?

Leader Note

The discovery moment. If they stall: who creates, what three things are created or transformed, and find the two “joy” words. Revelation 21:1-5 may be read as the completion if time allows.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Isaiah’s new creation is creation remade: new heavens and a new earth, Jerusalem created “a rejoicing” and her people “a joy,” former distresses not remembered, and God himself rejoicing over his city. The hope is not evacuation to a cloud; it is this world, healed and transfigured, with embodied people and a city and God dwelling in it (Rev 21:1-5 completes it: the city comes down; God wipes tears; “Behold, I make all things new”). The Church teaches exactly this (CCC 1042-1047, quoting tonight’s verse at 1043): the universe itself, groaning now (Rom 8:19-22), will be set free. Which means nothing truly good is finally lost, and “in which righteousness dwells” means what has broken your heart in this world, injustice, will be the one thing that cannot get in.

Movement Three: Beloved Brother, Final Word (3:15-18)

Read: 2 Peter 3:15-18 (from participants’ own Bibles)

- Q7.** Verses 15-16: Peter calls Paul “our beloved brother,” ranks his letters with “the other scriptures,” and admits some things in them are “hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction.” Two questions. First, remember Galatians 2:11-14: what had passed between these two men, and what does “beloved brother” therefore cost and reveal? Second: this verse resolves Session Ten’s open thread; if inspired Scripture itself can be twisted to destruction, what is the remedy, according to everything this letter has said?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

First: at Antioch, Paul opposed Peter “to his face” publicly, and published the rebuke in a letter the churches copied. Peter’s last written words about him are “our beloved brother... the wisdom given him”: the corrected man canonizes his corrector, humility with three decades of proof. They would die in the same city and share one feast (June 29). Fraternal correction received well is not a wound to authority but its adornment. Second: the resolution of Session Ten. Verse 16 places apostolic writings among “the other scriptures,” a remarkable New Testament witness to their scriptural authority, and it testifies in the same breath that Scripture is twistable, so possessing the true text is not yet possessing the truth. The letter’s own remedy has been in place since 1:12-15: stable, guided remembrance within the apostolic community, the guide Philip was to the eunuch (Acts 8:31), the standard St. Vincent named, the Church reading her own book. Love the lamp; read it in the family; “beware lest you... lose your own stability” (3:17).

Q8. The last sentence Peter ever wrote: “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity” (3:18). Set it beside Session Nine’s ladder (1:5-8). Why is “grow” the perfect final imperative for everything both letters have taught, and what does it rule out about the Christian life at every age?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The letters open the second movement with “make every effort to supplement” and close it with “grow”: the ladder was never a program to complete but a life to continue; stability (3:17) is not standing still but growing in the right direction, the way a tree is stable. It rules out arrival: there is no age, office, or level of study, including finishing this one, at which growth becomes optional; the alternative to growing is not coasting but being “carried away.” And notice the doxology: glory is given directly to Jesus Christ, “now and to the day of eternity,” the letter’s final quiet confession of the divinity it opened with (1:1). The fisherman’s last written breath is worship.

Send: Carrying It Out and Closing the Study

- ◆ Harvest the twelve weeks: which single verse from these letters has changed how you actually live, and what is the evidence?
- ◆ We began as “exiles of the Dispersion” and we end waiting for “new heavens and a new earth.” Where in your life do you most feel the exile’s homesickness right now, and how does tonight’s promise re-aim it?
- ◆ God’s patience (3:9) has a headcount, and someone you know is on it. Who, and what is your part in the reason for the delay?

Live It This Week

Going forward: (1) Memorize 2 Peter 3:13, and recite it at every funeral, diagnosis, and headline that tempts you to despair. (2) Keep the ladder card from Session Nine where you can see it; review your rung monthly. (3) Adopt one person from your 3:9 answer for daily prayer and one concrete act of witness this month. (4) Keep the lamp lit: choose your next Scripture study before this group disbands, tonight if possible. (5) Pray St. Teresa’s bookmark in every waiting room of your life: all things are passing; God never changes; patience obtains all things.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, our God and Savior: you are not slow but patient, holding the door for people we love. Make us holy and at peace while we wait, growing in grace and knowledge until the day dawns. And when the elements dissolve and everything genuine is disclosed, let us, and those we prayed for tonight, be found in you, at home at last in the new heavens and the new earth where righteousness dwells. To you be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Scripture Memory

“But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13, RSV2CE)

Leader Reference Card

Primary text

2 Peter 3:1-18 (movements: 1-9, 10-14, 15-18)

Discovery passage (read aloud in session)

Isaiah 65:17-19 (with 66:22); optionally Revelation 21:1-5 as completion

Leader background and Dig Deeper

Psalm 90:4 (quoted 3:8); Matthew 24:43-44; 1 Thessalonians 5:2 (thief); Acts 1:7 (times and seasons)

1 Timothy 2:4 (universal salvific will); Romans 8:19-22 (creation groaning); Galatians 2:11-14 (Antioch)

Acts 8:31 (the guide); Genesis 6-9 (flood, third appearance)

Threads: final harvest

RESOLVED: interpretation (1:20-21 with 3:15-16); growth (1:5 with 3:18); exile (1 Pet 1:1 with 3:13)

Completed: fire (1 Pet 1:7; 4:12; 2 Pet 3:7-13); flood (Sessions Six, Eleven, Twelve)

Catechism

CCC 673; 1037; 1042-1047 (esp. 1043); 2822