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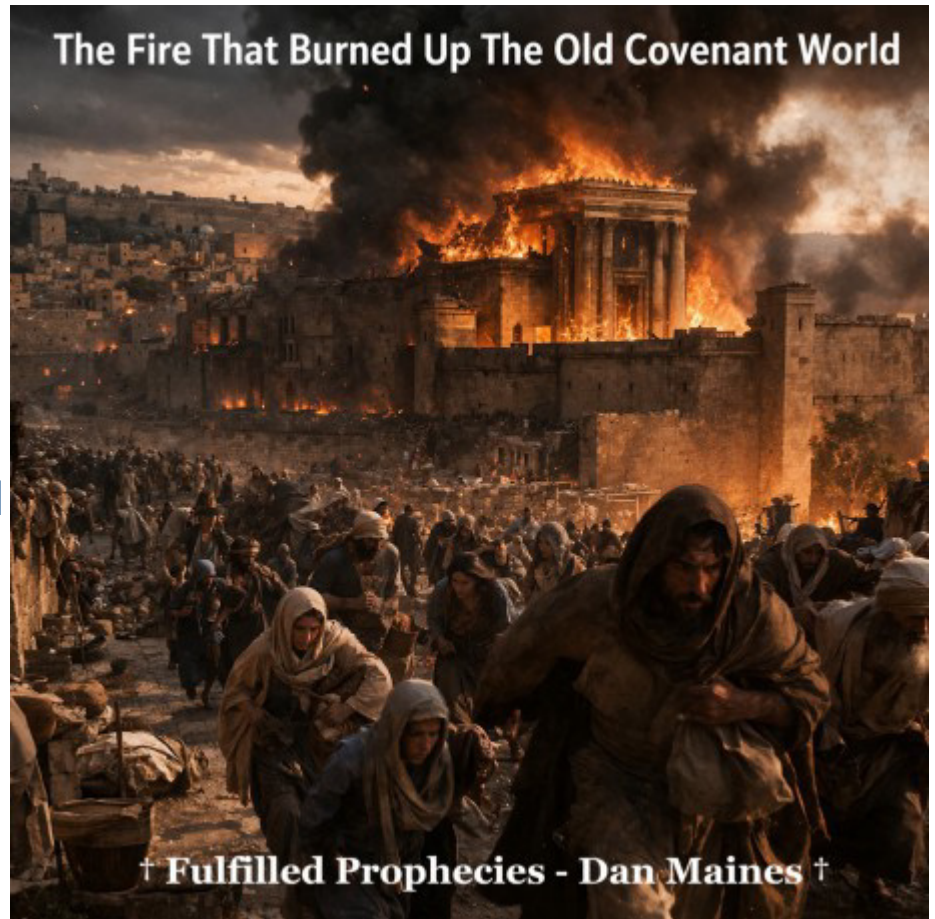
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2 Peter 3:10-12 - The Fire That Burned Up The Old Covenant World



By Dan Maines

The Fire That Burned Up The Old Covenant World

Introduction

† When Peter spoke about the heavens passing away and the elements melting with fervent heat, he wasn't describing the end of the physical planet, he was describing the end of the Old Covenant world centered in Jerusalem (2 Peter 3:10).

† The Bible consistently uses fire and melting language for covenant judgment, not literal destruction of the earth (Isaiah 13:6-13; Joel 2:1-11).

† If we read 2 Peter 3 in light of the Old Testament, it becomes clear this is fulfilled prophetic language, not a future global catastrophe (2 Peter 3:2).

2 Peter 3:10-12

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and the works that are in it will be exposed.

Since all these things are going to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and will be dissolved, and the elements will be melted with intense heat?

† The "day of the Lord" is not the end of the physical world, it is a well-established phrase for covenant judgment on a nation, especially Israel (Isaiah 13:6-13; Joel 2:1-11).

† The "heavens" represent the ruling authority of Israel, the leadership, priesthood, and temple system (Isaiah 1:2; Matthew 23:35-36).

† The "earth" represents the covenant people under that system, not the physical planet (Deuteronomy 31:28; Isaiah 1:2).

† The "elements" refers to the basic principles of the Old Covenant law system, not atomic particles (Galatians 4:3; Colossians 2:8, 20).

† Paul uses the same word "elements" to describe the bondage of the law, showing this is covenant language, not scientific terminology (Galatians 4:9).

† The melting with intense heat is symbolic of judgment, just like when God judged nations using the same kind of language (Isaiah 34:4; Nahum 1:5).

† Peter is pulling directly from Old Testament prophetic

language, not introducing a new idea about the destruction of the universe (2 Peter 3:2).

† The word translated "elements" is the Greek word Stoicheion, and this is critical to understanding what is actually being destroyed (2 Peter 3:10).

† Stoicheion appears seven times in the New Testament, and not one time does it refer to physical elements of the earth or universe (Galatians 4:3; Colossians 2:8; Hebrews 5:12).

† Without studying Stoicheion, people assume Peter is talking about the planet burning, but scripture already defines the word for us (2 Peter 3:16).

Galatians 4:3

So also we, when we were children, were enslaved under the elemental principles of the world.

† Stoicheion here clearly refers to bondage under the Old Covenant system, not physical matter (Galatians 4:1-5).

Galatians 4:9

But now that you have come to know God—or rather to be known by God—how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental principles of the world, to which you desire to be enslaved once more?

† These elemental principles are something people return to, proving they are religious systems, not atoms (Galatians 4:10).

Colossians 2:8

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elemental principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

† Stoicheion is tied to traditions of men and religious systems, not the physical universe (Colossians 2:22).

Colossians 2:20

If you have died with Christ to the elemental principles of the world, why, as if you were still living in the world, do you submit to regulations?

† You are not dying to physical creation, you are dying to a covenant system, proving these elements are covenantal (Romans 7:4-6; Colossians 2:20).

Hebrews 5:12

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

† Stoicheion is defined as elementary teachings or principles, not physical elements (Hebrews 6:1).

† Now here's the question that exposes the whole misunderstanding, how can a principle melt with intense heat (2 Peter 3:10)?

† It can't physically, because Peter is using prophetic language describing the destruction of a covenant system, not a planet (Isaiah 34:4).

† The things being destroyed were the very elements listed in these passages, the law, ordinances, traditions, and Old Covenant structure (Hebrews 8:13; Colossians 2:14).

† Peter compares this judgment to the flood, but the flood did not destroy the physical planet, it destroyed a world order, a society of people (2 Peter 3:5-6).

† The "world" that perished in Noah's day was the people and system, not the earth itself, since the earth remained after the flood (Genesis 8:21-22).

† This establishes the pattern, world-ending language refers to covenantal or societal destruction, not the annihilation of the

planet (Ecclesiastes 1:4).

Isaiah 34:4

All the host of heaven will be dissolved, and the heavens will be rolled up like a scroll; all their stars will fall like the withered leaves from the vine, and like the fallen figs from the fig tree.

† This language was used for the judgment of Edom, yet the physical sky did not literally roll up (Isaiah 34:5-6).

† This proves that "heavens dissolving" is symbolic of political and covenantal collapse (Isaiah 13:10).

† Peter is using the same imagery, applying it to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Old Covenant system (2 Peter 3:10).

Malachi 4:1

For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace, when all the arrogant and all who do evil will be stubble; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.

† This prophecy speaks of a coming fiery judgment upon Israel, fulfilled in the first century (Matthew 3:10-12).

† Jesus tied this judgment directly to His generation (Matthew 23:36).

† The fire is not literal combustion of the earth, it is the complete removal of the Old Covenant order (Hebrews 8:13).

Matthew 24:16

But when you see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.

† Jesus told them to flee, which makes no sense if the entire planet was going to burn (Matthew 24:15-16).

† You can't escape global destruction by running to the mountains, this was a localized covenant judgment (Luke

21:20-21).

† This proves the fire of judgment was focused on Jerusalem and its system, not the earth itself (Matthew 23:36).

† If the earth was going to be burned up, there would be nowhere to flee, yet Jesus told them to flee, proving this was a localized judgment, not global destruction (Matthew 24:16; Luke 21:20-21).

Hebrews 12:27-28

Now this phrase, 'Yet once more,' indicates the removal of things that are shaken, as of created things, so that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.

Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and through grace, let us serve God acceptably with reverence and awe.

† The writer of Hebrews explains the same event as a "shaking," not the destruction of the planet (Haggai 2:6-7).

† What was removed was the Old Covenant system, what remained was the unshakable kingdom of Christ (Hebrews 8:13).

† This matches Peter's description of elements dissolving, it is covenant transition language (2 Peter 3:10-12).

† Peter said these things were about to happen and tied them to the same coming Jesus spoke of, which was to occur in that generation (2 Peter 3:3-4; Matthew 24:34).

† Moses called Israel "heaven and earth," showing this language refers to a covenant people, not the physical universe (Deuteronomy 31:28).

† This proves Peter is using established covenant language, not introducing a new idea about the destruction of the planet (2 Peter 3:2).

Historical References

† Josephus describes the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 as a fiery judgment where the temple and city were completely consumed (Josephus, Wars of the Jews, Book 6).

† Tacitus records the Roman assault and burning of the temple, confirming the historical fulfillment of this prophecy (Tacitus, Histories 5.13).

† Eusebius affirms that these events fulfilled Jesus' warnings about that generation (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3).

How It Applies To Us Today

† We are not waiting for the world to burn, that judgment already happened in the first century (2 Peter 3:10).

† We live in the unshakable kingdom that cannot be destroyed, established after the Old Covenant was removed (Hebrews 12:28).

† This gives us confidence and clarity, we are not looking for destruction, we are living in fulfillment (Luke 21:32).

† It calls us to holy living because we are already part of God's eternal kingdom (2 Peter 3:11).

† The Old Covenant world was consumed in fire in AD 70, and what remained is the unshakable kingdom we live in today (Hebrews 12:28).

Q & A Appendix

Q What does Stoicheion mean in 2 Peter 3?

A It means elemental principles or basic components of a system, referring to the Old Covenant law and its ordinances, not physical elements (Galatians 4:3; Colossians 2:20).

Q How can elements melt if they are principles?

A The melting is symbolic language for judgment and removal, just like Old Testament prophecies describing nations falling (Isaiah 34:4).

Q Why did Jesus tell people to flee if the earth was going to burn?

A Because the judgment was local to Judea and Jerusalem, not global, confirming this was covenant judgment (Luke 21:20-21).

Q What exactly was destroyed in 2 Peter 3?

A The Old Covenant world, including the temple, priesthood, law system, and all its ordinances (Hebrews 8:13; Colossians 2:14).

Q Does "elements melting" mean the periodic table elements are burning?

A No, the Greek word *Stoicheion* is never used for physical elements in the New Testament, it always refers to basic principles or systems, especially the Old Covenant law (Galatians 4:3; Colossians 2:8; Hebrews 5:12).

Q Why does Peter use fire language if it's not literal?

A Because the Old Testament repeatedly uses fire to describe covenant judgment on nations, not literal destruction of the planet (Isaiah 34:4; Malachi 4:1).

Q What does "the earth and the works in it will be exposed" mean?

A It means the works of the Old Covenant system, especially centered in Jerusalem, were brought to judgment and laid bare (Ecclesiastes 12:14; Hebrews 4:13).

Q How do we know Peter is not talking about the end of the world?

A Because he is quoting Old Testament prophetic language that was always used for national judgment, not the end of the physical creation (Isaiah 13:10; Isaiah 34:4).

Q What are the "heavens" that passed away?

A They represent the ruling authority and covenant structure of Israel, including the priesthood and temple system (Isaiah 1:2;

Matthew 23:35-36).

Q What are the "elements" that were destroyed?

A The elementary principles of the Old Covenant system, the law, ordinances, and traditions that people were in bondage to (Galatians 4:3; Colossians 2:20).

Q Why compare it to the flood if it's not global destruction?

A Because the flood destroyed a world of people and a system, not the planet itself, and Peter is using that same pattern (2 Peter 3:5-6; Genesis 8:21-22).

Q If this already happened, why do people still expect a future event?

A Because they read the language literally instead of understanding how the Bible uses symbolic and covenantal language for judgment (2 Peter 3:16).

Q What was actually burned in AD 70?

A The temple, the city of Jerusalem, and the entire Old Covenant system that depended on it (Matthew 24:2; Hebrews 8:13).

Q Does this mean the physical earth will never be destroyed?

A Scripture teaches the earth remains, while covenant worlds rise and fall (Ecclesiastes 1:4; Psalm 104:5).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† 2 Peter 3:10-12; Galatians 4:3, 9; Colossians 2:8, 20; Hebrews 5:12; Hebrews 6:1; Hebrews 7:18-19; Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 12:27-28; Isaiah 34:4-6; Isaiah 13:10; Matthew 23:36; Matthew 24:15-16, 34; Luke 21:20-21, 32; Haggai 2:6-7;

Romans 7:4-6; Galatians 2:19; Colossians 2:14, 22; Genesis 8:21-22; Ecclesiastes 1:4; 2 Peter 3:3-6; Deuteronomy 31:28

† Josephus, Wars of the Jews, Book 6; Tacitus, Histories 5.13; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3

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