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THE WILLFUL SKEPTICISM OF THE LAST DAYS

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The following is excerpted from the new edition of *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, one of the courses of the Advanced Bible Studies Series published by Way of Life Literature. One of the new sections of the course is "Bible Prophecies Being Fulfilled Today," and the following study is from that section. The new edition of *Understanding Bible Prophecy* (September 2012) is completely rewritten and significantly enlarged.

"Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, 4 And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. 5 For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: 6 Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: 7 But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

8 But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Peter 3:2-10).

This amazing 2000-year-old prophecy describes the skepticism that prevails in the 21st century. "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers..." (2 Pet. 3:3).

The prophecy indicates that the 19th century marked the beginning of the “last days” of the church age, because it was in the 19th century that this prophecy began to be fulfilled to perfection. The 19th century witnessed the explosion of skepticism in the form of theological modernism, humanism, Unitarianism, Darwinian evolution, communism, and agnosticism.

1. We see the rejection of the Bible’s teaching on the Flood (2 Peter 3:4-6).

Peter describes the scoffers in the last days who will say that “since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (2 Pet. 3:4). This is a perfect description of the “uniformitarian” view of geology, which came to the fore in the 19th century through the influence of Charles Lyell’s *Principles of Geology*. According to this view, the geological strata were laid down gradually over millions of years and there was no global Flood. Walt Brown, Ph.D. in mechanical engineering from MIT, describes the view that has prevailed since those days. “Professors in the new and growing field of geology were primarily selected from those who supported the anti-catastrophe principle. These professors did not advance students who espoused catastrophes. An advocate of a global flood was branded a ‘biblical literalist’ or ‘fuzzy thinker’--not worthy of an academic degree” (*In the Beginning*, p. 253).

Prior to the 19th century, it was generally believed even by scientists that God created the world and that there was a catastrophic universal Flood. In 1930 Merson Davies observed, “We should remember that, up to 100 years ago [up to 1830], such a marked prejudice against the acceptance of belief in the Deluge did not exist.” For example, in the 17th and 18th centuries Cambridge University scholars believed in a universal Flood, but by Darwin’s day they did not. Thomas Burnet (1635-1715), royal chaplain to king William III, argued for a worldwide flood in *A Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1681). This was one of most popular works on geology prior to the 19th century. John Woodward (1665-1728), founder of the Woodwardian Professorship of Geology at Cambridge, argued that the global Flood was the cause of the fossil beds. This position was published in *An Essay Toward a Natural Theory of the Earth* (1695).

But by the 19th century, the evolutionary view took control and the prophecy of 2 Peter 3 was being fulfilled.

2. We see mankind’s rejection of divine creation (2 Peter 3:5).

Peter says the scoffers will reject the Bible’s teaching that the world was made “by the word of God.” The doctrine of evolution has gone hand-in-hand with agnosticism, atheism, and a denial of the supernatural. It was Thomas Huxley, “Darwin’s Bulldog,” who coined the term “agnosticism” to describe the view that man cannot know whether or not there is a God, that man can only know the truth through science and that “religion” isn’t allowed a voice, and that even if there is a God it really doesn’t matter, because He isn’t involved in man’s affairs.

The scoffers do mention “creation” (2 Pet. 3:4), but by this they don’t mean the six days of creation according to the Bible. Even Charles Darwin used the word “creation” at the end of *On the Origin of Species*, but he later explained that he simply meant by this that life “appeared by some wholly unknown process” (Darwin, *Autobiography*, p. 272).

3. We see the motive of the scoffers (2 Pet. 3:3).

The Bible is a supernatural Book that reveals the secrets of men’s hearts. It pierces “even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit” (Heb. 4:12). In this case, the Bible peers deeply into the human soul and reveals that the unbelief of the scoffers is “willful” because their motive is to walk in their own lusts and not be bound by God’s moral laws. It is their love of sin that puts them in rebellion against God. Men first refuse to believe, then Satan blinds their minds (2 Cor. 4:4).

The will of man must surrender to God and His truth for the blindness to be lifted (2 Cor. 3:14-16). The will is the difference between a Ph.D. like Lowell Coker (microbiology and biochemistry, author of *Darwin’s Design Dilemma*), who believes the Bible, and a Ph.D. like Richard Dawkins (author of *The Blind Watchmaker*), who doesn’t. Both men are trained in modern science at a high level and both look at the same evidence, but they come to completely different conclusions, and this is because one man simply refuses to believe the implications of what he sees with his own eyes.

Evolutionist Richard Lewontin admitted as much when he said, “We have a prior commitment to materialism. ... we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door” (“Billions and Billions of Demons,” *The New York Review*, Jan. 9, 1997, p. 31).

This is a pointed reminder that every child growing up in a Bible-believing church must make his own choice about God and salvation, and that a desire to walk after one’s own lusts will produce spiritual blindness. Each child has the ability to believe or not to believe. God gives men a choice, but they must suffer the consequences of those choices. I grew up in a Baptist church and heard the gospel from my earliest years, and I don’t recall ever rejecting Jesus and the Bible in a conscious manner. What happened was that I simply loved sin and pursued sin; I was captivated by the rock & roll pop culture; and because of that my mind became blinded and I ended up being a skeptic until I was converted at age 23.

4. We see their ignorance (2 Pet. 3:5).

Skeptics tend to be proud of their knowledge, but in reality they are ignorant of the knowledge that counts the most, which is knowledge of God’s Word. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom (Psalm 111:10).

Most of the committed skeptics don't know any more about Bible than I did before I was saved. In fact, most of them probably don't know as much. I thought I knew the Bible, because I had grown up in a Bible-believing church and had attended faithfully until my teenage years, but actually I just knew some disjointed Bible stories that didn't seem to have any real bearing on daily life. I didn't understand the overall theme of the Bible; didn't understand how each part of the Bible fits together to form the whole; didn't know the rules of proper Bible interpretation or how to apply them. I had never been taught how to defend the Bible against skepticism, and didn't even know it was defensible. I didn't know any of the evidences for the Bible's divine inspiration. I didn't even have a really clear understanding of the gospel, though I had made a profession of faith in my youth. I had never read the whole Bible through, but I argued against Bible-believing Christians as if I were a true expert!

5. We see their faith (2 Pet. 3:4-5).

Evolutionary skeptics typically pride themselves in thinking that they are following the scientific facts, whereas the Bible believer is pursuing "blind religious faith."

The truth is exactly the opposite. In reality, they are pursuing their own lusts rather than truth. They are willfully ignorant and are holding blindly to myths.

There is nothing more mythical than to believe that everything came from nothing, that life came from non-life, that intelligence came from non-intelligence, and that great intelligence is a product of small intelligence!

6. We see their undeserved opportunity (2 Pet. 3:9).

God is not willing that any perish. The reason that He sent His Son to die for man's sin is His love for the world (John 3:16) and every skeptic has an opportunity to be saved through repentance and faith in Christ.

Many highly educated scientists have believed God's Word. The book *Testimonies of Scientists Who Believe the Bible* contain biographical sketches of about 70 men and women with Ph.D.s in the hard sciences that believe in a six-day creation. This free eBook is available from the Way of Life web site -- www.wayoflife.org.

God cannot be blamed for man's judgment. Unlike the caricature of God that many evolutionists believe, God is compassionate. For example, the late atheist Christopher Hitchens called God a "divine dictator" and likened Him to the brutal dictator of North Korea. In fact, God is so merciful and compassionate that He Himself came to this sin-cursed earth, through His Son, and suffered on the cross in the place of the sinful creatures who had rebelled against Him. God

has not sinned against man; man has sinned against God and broken His holy laws.

I am thankful that skeptics can be saved. I was a skeptic in 1973 when God convicted me of my sin and showed me the truth through His Word and I bowed my knees before His majesty and repented of my rebellion and trusted Jesus as my Saviour. Multitudes of skeptics have been saved by God's grace, and you can be, too.

7. We see the future of skeptics who persist in unbelief (2 Pet. 3:9-10).

God is merciful and compassionate and longsuffering, but He is also holy and just and He does not ignore the breaking of His laws. Salvation is available in Jesus Christ for every man, but if a man dies in his sin without the Saviour he will suffer eternal condemnation. There will be no end to the judgment because there is no end to the sinning. Sinners who die in their sin do not cease to exist; the body dies but the spirit lives, either in heaven or in hell. And unconverted sinners persist in their rebellion against God even beyond the grave. To reject Jesus Christ is to reject the only divinely-appointed means of salvation. To reject God's gracious offer of salvation in Christ, to resist the Spirit of God who is in the world to draw men to Christ, is the only unforgivable sin.