

One Day is as a Thousand Years

This study centers on the true meaning of **2 Peter 3:8**. Let's begin by reading this verse.

2 Peter 3:8 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.

Many individuals run to this Scripture to try to defend the nonoccurrence of the return of Jesus which has been delayed for 2,000 years and counting.

These same individuals ignore the other 318 times that the imminent return of Jesus was mentioned in the books of the New Testament.

This equates to about one out of every 30 verses mention the return of Jesus. It was very evident that the first century believers were expecting the return of Jesus at any moment and certainly in their lifetime.

It is impossible for one verse to negate one of the major themes of the whole New Testament. Instead of snatching this one verse out of its proper context, let's take a closer look at this verse and examine its true meaning.

The most important rule for proper interpretation of Scripture is context. When context is correct, content will always be right.

Let us look at the context of this verse. The Apostle Peter begins the 3rd chapter reminding the first century Church to “***stir up your pure minds of remembrance***”. (**2 Peter 3:1-2**) Peter admonishes them to remember the words spoken by the Holy Prophets, by the Apostles, and by Jesus Himself.

Peter was encouraging the believers to persevere in their faith and to not give into doubt and despair. In **verse 3**, Peter reminds them also of scoffers that are present in the last days. (**2 Peter 3:3-4**)

Now, let's identify exactly when these “**last days**” that Peter referred to were to occur.

Peter quoted the Old Testament Prophet Joel when he proclaimed that they were in the last days on the Day of Pentecost. (**Acts 2:17**)

Hebrews 1:2 also identifies the last days beginning in the first century during the earthly ministry of Jesus. **1 John 2:18** actually says that it is the last time. **1 Corinthians 10:11** says that the “**ends of the world**” had come upon them.

There are many more Scriptures that clearly define the last days existing during that first century. Peter, along with the rest of the New Testament writers identified **their generation** as the “**last-days generation**”. This means that these scoffers were present in their generation.

What exactly were these scoffers saying?

The main theme of their scoffing was the delay of the return of Jesus. It had only been around 30 years and Jesus had not returned yet.

This fact alone proves the imminency with which the Apostles taught. Again, they expected the Lord to return in their lifetime.

In his reply to what the scoffers were saying, Peter calls them **“willingly ignorant”**. Peter reminded them of the days of Noah.

The Lord was also longsuffering in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. All things continued as normal in Noah’s day as well until the sudden judgment of God came and destroyed all the wickedness by a perilous flood. Noah’s world was destroyed by water. **(2 Peter 3:5-6)**

Then, Peter addresses the present heavens and earth that they were living in back in the first century. Their first-century heavens and earth were being ***“reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men”***. **(2 Peter 3:7)**

Notice the subject in this verse is their heaven and earth not our modern-day physical planet earth and universe. And now we come to verse 8 which states a fact about the nature of God.

Upon closer examination, notice the exact words of Peter in **verse 8: “one day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years is as one day.”**

The use of the word **“as”** in comparing a thousand years to one day is called a simile. The fact that Peter used a simile here to describe the character of God makes this expression a figure of speech or figurative language.

This is not a narrative which is interpreted literally. A simile is a comparison of two unlike things using the words **“like”** or **“as”** to bring out a similarity of character.

We use similes all the time in our everyday speech.

Some examples are:

- **“Susan is as quiet as a mouse.”**
- **“Jim is as strong as an ox.”**
- **“The children were as busy as bees.”**

These expressions are not to be taken literally.

Susan is not a mouse nor is Jim an ox and the children certainly are not bees.

These similes are used to paint a picture with words. These similes tell us something about the character of these individuals.

So it is with the expression that we find in the simile ***“one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years is as one day.”***

Just as Susan is not a mouse and Jim is not an ox, one day is not 1,000 years and 1,000 years is not one day. This simile is painting a picture about the character of God.

God is eternal and transcends all time. He dwells in the realm of eternity. This verse was never meant to give a definition of one day being equal to 1,000 years or 1,000 years being equal to one day.

In **verse 9**, Peter gives us a reason for the **“slackness”** or for the **“delay”** of his coming. The reason for His longsuffering is that He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. **(2 Peter 3:9)**

The prophet Ezekiel speaks about this same concept in **Ezekiel 33:11**.

In **2 Peter 3:15**, Peter references Paul speaking of this same concept of the longsuffering of God leading men to repentance. **(Romans 2:4)** It was the love of God for His people that resulted in the “longsuffering” or “delay” in the coming judgment at the return of Jesus.

The day of the Lord did come as a thief in the night, suddenly and totally unexpected to the scoffers and to the wicked, but many believers were looking for Him and were ready. **(1 Thessalonians 3:13, Hebrews 9:28)**

Peter goes on to admonish these first-century believers to diligently maintain their holiness and to be found at peace without blame and spotless in Him. **(2 Peter 3:11 & 14)**

They were looking for these things to happen in their lifetime. Their heavens and their earth did pass away and the elements of the temple cultus were burned up and did melt with fervent heat.

Conclusion

Peter did not intend **2 Peter 3:8** to be used as a reason to support a long 2,000-year delay in the promise of His coming. Peter was using figurative language to convey a wonderful truth about the character of God.

Peter used a simile to paint a word picture to relate the fact that God transcends time because God created time. This imagery flows with the context of the whole third chapter.

When we read the Scriptures in their proper context, the true meaning will become clear. We must never be found guilty of snatching one verse out of its context to support a doctrine or tradition that has been taught.

Always remember, no Scripture will ever negate another Scripture. It is only after all Scripture has been examined on any particular subject can true Bible doctrine be established.

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