

## 2 PETER 3:8 AND THE DAYS OF GENESIS 1

Bert Thompson, Ph.D.

**There is a passage in 2 Peter 3:8 that states: “But forget not this one thing, beloved, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” Doesn’t this passage indicate that the “days” of Genesis could have been “thousands of years” in duration, rather than twenty-four hours?**

No, it does not. The passage in 2 Peter 3 is not discussing the length of the days in Genesis 1. Nor is it speaking of the length of “God’s days” in general. Those who suggest that support can be found in Peter’s statements for increasing the length of the creation days have failed to take into account the context of Peter’s comments—a context that is critical to an understanding of the apostle’s message.

**[I]n the last days** mockers shall come with mockery, walking after their own lusts, and saying, “Where is the promise of his coming? for, from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.” For this they willfully forget, that there were heavens from of old, and an earth compacted out of water and amidst water, by the word of God; by which means the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: but the heavens that now are, and the earth, by the same word have been stored up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But forget not this one thing, beloved, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness; but is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief... (emp. added).

John C. Whitcomb observed:

Note carefully that the verse does **not** say that God’s days last thousands of years, but that “one day is with the Lord as a thousand years.” In other words, God is completely above the limitations of time in the sense that he can accomplish in **one literal day** what nature or man could not

accomplish in thousands of years, if ever. Note that one day is “as a thousand years,” not “is a thousand years,” with God. If “one day” in this verse means a long period of time, then we would end up with the following absurdity: “a long period of time is with the Lord as a thousand years.” Instead of this, the verse reveals how much God can accomplish in a 24-hour day, and thus sheds much light upon the events of Creation Week (1975, 36:68, emp. in orig.).

Peter is discussing specific things that will take place “**in the last days**” when mockers shall ask, “Where is the promise of his coming?” He is not referring to, nor does his discussion center on, “**the first days**” (i.e., the days of Genesis 1). Rather, he is warning against those living in the Christian dispensation who, after Christ’s resurrection and ascension, doubted that He would return as He had promised. Guy N. Woods elucidated the thrust of Peter’s comments when he wrote:

The passage should be considered in the light of its context. The material heavens and earth are to suffer destruction by fire, despite the mockers who scoff at such predictions and who allege, in the face of the earth’s earlier destruction by water, that all things must continue as they are from the beginning (2 Peter 3:1-7). All such are “willingly ignorant,” and refuse to accept the clear and obvious lessons of history. Faithful followers of the Lord are not to be influenced by these skeptics, but to remember “that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.”

By this the apostle meant that the passing of time does not, in any way, affect the performance of God’s promises or threats. He is not influenced by the passing of the centuries; and the lapse of time between the promise or threat, and the performance, is no factor, at all. With man, it definitely is. That which we promise to do tomorrow, we are much more likely to do, than that which we promise next year, or in the next century, since we may not be here then to fulfill the promise. But, this limitation, so characteristic

of man, does not influence Deity. The passing of a thousand years, to God, does not alter his plans and purposes any more than a day, and he will carry them out as he has planned, regardless of the amount of time which is involved (1976, p. 146).

In his commentary on Peter's epistles, R.C.H. Lenski brilliantly explained both the purpose of the apostle's comments and the impact those comments were intended to have on his readers.

Entirely too much escapes the mockers, hence their ignorant mocking (v. 5-7). This is a point that may escape even Peter's readers, which he, therefore, wants them to note well: "that one day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." This is Peter's own statement which is based on Ps. 90:4: "A thousand years in thy sight are as yesterday when it is passed and as a watch in the night." God created time....

With the Lord time is evidently not what it is to us who live in time. He is above time. Peter does not say that the Lord is timeless, which he, of course, is, but that **his** relation to time must never be confused with **our** relation to time. A day seems short to us, a thousand years a very long period. With the Lord a single day is "as a thousand years," and vice versa. Let us not overlook the two  $\omega$ s, "as." Peter does not say: "A single day **is** a thousand years, and a thousand years **are** a day...." Whether it be a day or a thousand years as we count time, both are really the same with the Lord; neither hampers nor helps him. Those who apply this dictum to the word "day" in Genesis 1 and make "day" in Genesis 1 equal to a period that consists of millions of years find no support in this passage (1966, pp. 344-345, emp. in orig.).

Henry M. Morris noted:

Similarly, the familiar verse in 2 Peter 3:8 has been badly misapplied when used to teach the day-age theory. In the context, it teaches the opposite, and one should remember that a "text without a context is a pretext." Peter...is saying that, despite man's naturalistic scoffings, God can do in one day what, on uniformitarian premises, might seem to require a thousand years. God does not require aeons of time to accomplish His work of creating and redeeming things. It is even interesting that on the above equation—one day for a thousand years or 365,000 days—the actual duration of God's work with the earth and man—say about 7,000 years becomes about two-and-a-half-billion years, which is at least of the order of magnitude of the "apparent age" of the world as calculated by uniformitarianism! (1974, pp. 226-227).

Biblical language scholar Weston W. Fields commented on the passage in this manner.

This verse is often used to support the Day-Age Theory. Yet far from supporting the theory, it actually disproves it! What the verse indicates is that things which are so complex that from the human standpoint they would seem to have taken God a thousand years to accomplish, are things God can do in one day. This verse shows us how God can do such a fantastic amount of work in such a short period of time (1976, p. 177).

This passage in 2 Peter 3:8 illustrates that time is of little essence with God. Peter's obvious intent is that in a short period time—namely, a day—God can do the work that would take man or nature a thousand years (if ever) to accomplish. Likewise, Peter says that God does not tire, although thousands of years may pass, because with Him a thousand years are as a day. This passage serves to illustrate the eternal nature of God—not that the days of Genesis are "eons of time." The days of Genesis 1 should not to be reinterpreted via a misapplication of 2 Peter 3:8.

## REFERENCES

- Fields, Weston W. (1976), *Unformed and Unfilled* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker).
- Lenski, R.C.H. (1966), *The Interpretation of I and II Epistles of Peter, and Three Epistles of John, and the Epistle of Jude* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg).
- Morris, Henry M. (1974), *Scientific Creationism* (San Diego, CA: Creation-Life Publishers).
- Whitcomb, John C. (1975), "The Science of Historical Geology in the Light of the Biblical Doctrine of a Mature Creation," *Westminster Theological Journal*, Fall.
- Woods, Guy N. (1976), *Questions and Answers: Open Forum* (Henderson, TN: Freed-Hardeman University).

Originally Published In  
*Reason & Revelation*  
April 2000, 20[4]:31

## ARTICLE REPRINT

Distributed by  
Apologetics Press, Inc.  
230 Landmark Drive  
Montgomery, AL 36117-2752  
(334) 272-8558