

“With the Lord ... a thousand years [are] as one day” (2 Peter 3:8)

(Some comments by James Stuart Russell.)

Bible Version

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Peter penned his second epistle sometime in the 60s AD. Chapter three of his epistle addresses the apparent delay in Jesus fulfilling his promise to return. Peter warns that soon, certain “scoffers” will arise to deride that promise. They will “come in the last days” (3:3; cf. 1Pet 4:7).¹

These scoffers — first-century Jews — will recall Jesus’ promise to return. They will allege its non-fulfillment with 30+ years having already elapsed (3:4). They will mock his promise of judgment against them, their city and temple; they will claim that nothing bad will happen since everything continues on as it always has.²

In hindsight, we know that Jesus fulfilled his promise just a few years after Peter penned his epistle.

For a fuller explanation of 2 Peter 3, see my article on this website: *2 Peter 3: A Preterist Interpretation*.

James Stuart Russell (1816-1895) authored an early preterist work called *The Parousia*.³

Quoted below are his comments concerning 2 Peter 3:8-9.

Peter’s “1000 years = one day” (notes Russell) is appealed to in order to completely disregard clear biblical time indicators: “... so that *soon* may mean *late*, and *near* may mean *distant*, and *short* may mean *long*, ...”

Recall this when considering the time indicators in Revelation 1:1, 3; 22:6-7, 10, 12, 20.

The Certainty of the Approaching Consummation

2 Peter 3:8, 9. — *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. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

Few passages have suffered more from misconstruction than this, which has been made to speak a language inconsistent with its obvious intention, and even incompatible with a strict regard to veracity.

There is probably an allusion here to the words of the psalmist, in which he contrasts the brevity of human life with the eternity of the divine existence, — ‘A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past’ (Psalm 90:4). It is a grand and impressive thought, and quite in unison with the sentiment of the apostle, — ‘One day is with the Lord as a thousand years.’ But surely it would be the height of absurdity to regard this sublime poetic image as a calculus for the divine measurement of time, or as giving us a warrant for wholly disregarding definitions of time in the predictions and promises of God.

¹ “Last days” in this context means the last days of Israel, before the nation’s termination in AD 70 (cf. Jas 5:3; 1Pet 4:7; 1Jn 2:18).

² Jesus promised to return “in the clouds of heaven” — as the divine Judge (Mt 24:30; 26:64; cf. Rev 1:7). Moreover, he would do so before that generation had all passed (Mt 16:27-28; 24:34; Lk 21:32). Judgment would culminate in the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple (Mt 22:7; 23:35 – 24:21; Lk 21:20-24).

³ Russell’s work was originally published in 1878. A second edition followed in 1887. The entire work is available online here: https://www.truthaccordingtoscripture.com/documents/parousia/Parousia_Russell.pdf.

Yet it is not unusual to quote these words as an argument or excuse for the total disregard of the element of time in the prophetic writings. Even in cases where a certain time is specified in the prediction, or where such limitations as 'shortly,' or 'speedily,' or 'at hand' are expressed, the passage before us is appealed to in justification of an arbitrary treatment of such notes of time, so that *soon* may mean *late*, and *near* may mean *distant*, and *short* may mean *long*, and vice versa. **When it is pointed out that certain predictions must, according to their own terms, be fulfilled within a limited time, the reply is, 'One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.'** Thus we find an eminent critic committing himself to such a statement as the following: 'The apostles for the most part wrote and spoke of [the Parousia] as soon to appear, not, however, without many and sufficient hints of an interval, and that no short one, first to elapse.' Another, alluding to St. Paul's prediction in 2 Thessalonians 2, remarks that 'it tells us that while the coming of the Lord was then near, it was also remote.' These are specimens of what passes for exegesis in not a few commentators of high repute.

It is surely unnecessary to repudiate in the strongest manner such a non-natural method of interpreting the language of Scripture. It is worse than ungrammatical and unreasonable, it is immoral. It is to suggest that God has two weights and two measures in His dealings with men, and that in His mode of reckoning there is an ambiguity and variableness which makes it impossible to tell 'what manner of time the Spirit of Christ in the prophets may signify.' It seems to imply that a day may not mean a day, nor a thousand years a thousand years, but that either may be the other. If this were so, there could be no interpretation of prophecy possible; it would be deprived of all precision, and even of all credibility; for it is manifest that if there could be such ambiguity and uncertainty in respect to time, there might be no less ambiguity and uncertainty in respect to everything else.

The Scriptures themselves, however, give no countenance to such a method of interpretation. Faithfulness is one of the attributes most frequently ascribed to the 'covenant-keeping God,' and the divine faithfulness is that which the apostle in this very passage affirms. To the taunt of the scoffers who impugn the faithfulness of God, and ask, 'Where is the promise of His coming?' he answers, 'The Lord is not slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness;' there is no fickleness nor forgetfulness in Him; the lapse of time does not invalidate His word; His promise stands sure whether for the near or the distant, for to-day or to-morrow, or a thousand years to come. **To Him one day and a thousand years are alike: that is to say, the promise which falls due in a day will be performed punctually, and the promise which falls due in a thousand years will be performed with equal punctuality. Length of time makes no difference to Him.** He will not falsify the promise which has only a day to run, nor forget the promise which has reference to a thousand years hence. Long or short, a day or an age, does not affect His faithfulness. 'The Lord is not slack concerning his promise;' He 'keepeth truth for ever.' But the apostle does not say that when the Lord promises a thing for to-day He may not fulfil His promise for a thousand years: that would be slackness; that would be a breach of promise. He does not say that because God is infinite and everlasting, therefore He reckons with a different arithmetic from ours, or speaks to us in a double sense, or uses two different weights and measures in His dealings with mankind. The very reverse is the truth. As Hengstenberg justly observes: 'He who speaks to men must speak according to human conceptions, or else state that he has not done so.'

It is evident that the object of the apostle in this passage is to give his readers the strongest assurance that the impending catastrophe of the last days was on the very eve of fulfilment. The veracity and faithfulness of God were the guarantees for the punctual performance of the promise. To have intimated that time was a variable quantity in the promise of God would have been to stultify his argument and neutralise his own teaching, which was, that 'the Lord is not slack concerning his promise.'

[Emphasis added. End of quote.]