

Biblical Interpretation & 2 Peter 3:8

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When people feel threatened by other viewpoints, those threatened will often manipulate a passage of Scripture so that it appears to support their own point of view. This is exactly what Futurists do with the subject of eschatology. The text of [2 Peter 3:8](#) is no exception, as it is possibly the most misrepresented text that non-Preterists use when disputing Preterism. The Futurist, when citing 2 Peter 3:8, conforms the text to what the Futurist wants it to say and fails to determine what the text itself means. When preparing to teach or preach on a passage of Scripture, good exegetical and hermeneutical procedure is adhered to by asking the following questions:

1. What does the text say?

The text of 2 Peter 3:8 (English Standard Version) reads: ***“But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.”*** This is a basic proclamation. However, the meaning of the text is understood within its over-arching context and will not be discovered by simply quoting verse 8 alone. We must, at all costs, avoid the temptation to quote a text out of its original context as others do in order to validate their opinion and win the argument at hand.

Typically, when this text is quoted, the argument at hand (with deference to its original context) is: ***“Don’t you understand that time is meaningless to the Lord, and that He can say that His Son can return at any moment (i.e., ‘soon’ or ‘at hand’) with that ‘moment’ possibly being thousands of years still in the future?”*** This type of position betrays a great sense of desperation. The Bible does not teach spiritual double-talk. The fact remains that all of the New Testament books either discuss the Second Coming explicitly or allude to it; moreover, each book places that coming directly within a first-century context.

The text of 2 Peter 3:8 has been proclaimed. But read alone we cannot fully understand the text. This brings us to the second step of biblical hermeneutics:

2. What does the text mean?

As was brought out in the first point, context is of primary concern when it comes to understanding any passage of Scripture. However, our context for understanding the verse under discussion does not merely contain a few verses before or after 2 Peter 3:8. Peter laid the ground work for his teaching on the timing of the Second Coming long before writing his second epistle. Notice that Peter’s statement about “a thousand years” is in response to a question—one that is defiantly posed by those whom Peter calls “scoffers.” Verse 3 states: ***“. . . knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, ‘Where is the promise of his coming?’”*** Going back to verse 1, we begin to understand the meaning of verse 8 and the “thousand years” statement. In order to refute the scoffers and their defiant question in verse 4, Peter states that he had written another epistle previously to this same group of recipients, namely, the first epistle of Peter: ***“This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them [1 and 2 Peter] I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder...”*** (It is true that Peter does not directly and irrefutably tell us that he is referring to his first epistle (i.e., 1 Peter); but if he is not, then to what could he possibly be referring? Since we have both 1 Peter and 2 Peter preserved for us as canonical Scripture, let us, for argument’s sake,

receive the proposition that here, in 2 Peter 3:1, he is referring to the first epistle that bears his name.)

At the end of verse 1, Peter states that he is, by what he is about to say, attempting to “remind” his readers of something that he had stated to them in his first epistle. In 2 Peter 3:2, he tells his readers to **“remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles”** concerning Christ’s Second Coming. (We know this because of the immediate reference to the dispute over the timing of the Second Coming being “scoffed at” by the scoffers in verse 4.) Thus, both Old and New Testament prophets prophesied concerning the timing of Christ’s Second Coming, and the Lord Jesus Himself taught regarding it.

Next, Peter directs us to the timing of the Second Coming in verse 3: **“...knowing this first of all [‘first of all,’ meaning that what he is about to say concerning the timing of Christ’s Second Coming is of ‘first’ importance], that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing...”** Clearly, the Parousia was predicted to occur within the period of time which Peter calls “the last days.” My intent is not to discuss the meaning of the term “last days” (the first-century Jews believed it represented the last days of the Mosaic system and the beginning of the reign of the Messiah). Rather, it is my intent to establish that what Peter called the “last days” was, in fact, the same generation in which Peter lived and ministered.

Thus, the scoffers were retaliating against the first-century teaching that Christ’s coming was certainly about to occur in their lifetimes. This is why it is important to understand why Peter made reference to “reminding” his readers about what he had stated previously to them in his first epistle concerning the timing of the last days. Peter makes it abundantly clear in [1 Peter 1:20](#) that the last days were the time in which Christ himself was first manifested in the flesh, carried out His ministry, sacrificed Himself on Calvary’s cross, and was resurrected bodily from the grave. According to 1 Peter 1:20, **“He [Christ] was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for your sake...”** The fact that Christ was upon the earth during what the Bible calls the last days or the last times is made abundantly clear from numerous passages ([Gen. 49:1, 10](#) and [Num. 24:17](#); cf. [Mt. 2:1-2](#); [Heb. 1:2, 9:26](#); [Acts 2:16-21](#); and [1 Jn. 2:18](#)). The scoffers’ scoffing was yet another sign that those alive in the first century were, in fact, living in the last days. Clearly, Peter believed that he was living and writing in the last days.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Peter now states in verse 4 that a person’s “sinful desire” asks the defiant question, **“Where is the promise of His coming?”** This is important: if the scoffers are asking the question of “where” the promise of His coming is, then this indicates that the scoffers were responding to the first-century teaching that Christ’s coming was “soon,” “at hand,” and “about to be.” This very important fact is missed by all Futurists who deny that the New Testament teaches a first-century Parousia. They are so livid in their denial of the biblical teaching that they fail to ask themselves the all-important question: **“Why are the scoffers scoffing at the promise of His coming?”** The simple answer is that they understood what Christians were proclaiming. However, because several years had passed, and the Temple was still standing, they felt that the promise of His coming had been proved false. The fact that they were scoffing verifies that the first-century church proclaimed a first-century Second Coming of Christ! No other explanation will suffice as to why the scoffers were scoffing at the first-century timing of Christ’s coming.

With the above in mind (and without belaboring verses 5-7), let us now answer the question at hand: “What does 2 Peter 3:8 mean?” While Peter refers to the fact that, to the Lord, a day is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as a day, Peter is not saying that time is a meaningless concept to God and that His apostles and prophets can say that Christ will come soon, or that His coming is at hand, while it is still thousands of years away. Rather, through the God-honoring method of proper biblical hermeneutics, we can discover precisely what Peter means when he refers

to a “thousand years.” The answer to the meaning of verse 8 is found in verse 9: ***“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise ...”*** Verse 8 simply means that God and His promises are not affected by time as it affects us who live “under the sun” ([Ecclesiastes 1:9](#)). Unlike God, we are bound by the tick-tock of the clock. When it comes to God fulfilling His promise of a first-century Parousia, He is not bound by the whims and ways of evil, unbelieving man. Note that, in verse 4, the scoffers asked in their defiant challenge to the confident expectation of a first-century Parousia, ***“Where is the promise of His coming?”*** And now, in verse 9, Peter answers his challengers directly: ***“The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise...”*** Of what “promise” is Peter speaking? The only “promise” referred to in this context is the promise of Christ’s expected first-century coming that was last mentioned in verse 4. Peter says that to question the validity of what the early church was preaching concerning the first-century expectation was nothing less than sinful (verse 3b). Since this is the “only” Second Coming to which the New Testament documents testify, then it is unreasonable and without biblical foundation to say that the scoffers were referring to anything else other than the proclamation of an expected first-century Parousia.

We are to understand that the phrase of a thousand years being as a day to God was not given in order to teach that the Second Coming could happen at any time or that time is meaningless to God relative to the Second Coming. Rather, we are to understand that verse 9 teaches us that, when God states what He does concerning the thousand years, it is meant to proclaim that the Lord is not “slow” (as the scoffers pronounced) when it comes to fulfilling His promise of Christ’s first-century Parousia. Why would someone “scoff” at a promise of a Second Coming that was still thousands of years in the future? They could only “scoff” at a Second Coming that was proclaimed to be at hand!

Having settled what the text says and means, we come to our final question:

3. What am I going to do about it?

The original intent of Scripture is not fully realized unless it is applied to one’s life. The question that remains for every properly exegeted passage of Scripture is: ***“What is this text demanding of me? What am I required to do with this information of a first-century expectation of the Parousia?”***

How about doing for others what I am doing for you, the reader, right now? Take this information, go over it and over it until you digest it thoroughly, and then ask God to send people to you who struggle over 2 Peter 3:8. You will be amazed at the number of folks He will send to you so that you might glorify Christ’s word in defiance of those who, according to their sinful desires ([2 Peter 3:3](#)), continue to declare a still-future-to-us Second Coming that is foreign to the text and meaning of Scripture.