

## Communication

*The History of the Universe in a Nutshell: Reflections on 2 Peter 3*

# The History of the Universe in a Nutshell: Reflections on 2 Peter 3

Krista Kay Bontrager



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*2 Peter 3 ... provides intriguing insight into how the biblical authors may have viewed the early chapters of Genesis, including the creation account.*

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**T**here is a sentiment on university campuses that discussions about religion and science are generally welcome, as long as they do not happen at the same time. Discussions about the Bible belong in the religion department. Discussions about science belong in the science department. And seldom, if ever, the two shall meet. What may be surprising to some is that this sentiment is not limited to secularists.

Prominent evolutionary biologist Simon Conway Morris, a devout Anglican, made clear in a recent radio interview that he wanted no part of marrying science with the Bible.<sup>1</sup> Esteemed Old Testament scholar John Walton promotes a similar, but more moderate position.<sup>2</sup> While Walton believes the scientific record can, at least in some sense, point us to the Creator, he is hesitant to derive any scientific content from the early chapters of Genesis. One common concern for Christian scholars like Conway Morris and Walton is that they want to guard the integrity of the Bible by not trying to make it say something scientific that it was never intended to say, thereby sparing it from ridicule if an interpretation is eventually overturned by science. The Roman Catholic Church's handling of the Galileo fiasco is frequently put forth as Exhibit A of the folly of such concordist methodology.

Walton rests his position squarely on the common evangelical belief that the meaning for any given text lies in the author's intent,

which sets certain boundaries for what the text means and how it can legitimately be interpreted.<sup>3</sup> One key restraint in the interpretive process involves the literary genre—the shared rules of interpretation that allow readers to access the author's meaning. Walton then uses these principles to try and demonstrate that the author of Genesis 1 and 2 intends to convey a creation narrative much in the same vein as other creation myths of the ancient near east.<sup>4</sup>

If this hypothesis is correct, it seems to follow that Genesis 1 and 2 should not be taken "literally," meaning that it should not be taken as having much, if any, actual historical content. But is this paradigm consistent with how the Bible interprets itself? Do the biblical authors speak about the early chapters of Genesis in such a way as to indicate that they saw it as being either mythology or history? Moreover, neither Simon Conway Morris nor John Walton has a problem with the miraculous nature of the Incarnation. They are willing to grant that the Bible contains *some* historical content, at least as it pertains to the life of Jesus Christ. The question is, what parts of the Bible are meant to be interpreted as myth (if any) and what parts are intended to be understood as history?

One way of tackling these provocative issues is to look at parallel creation passages and try to detect how other biblical authors view Genesis 1. One such passage is 2 Peter 3. This little used chapter provides intriguing insight into how the biblical authors may have viewed the early chapters of Genesis, including the creation account.

## Putting 2 Peter in Context

Before jumping into chapter 3, it is important to lay the groundwork for the epistle in general. Reading an epistle is a bit like listening to one end of a phone conversation.<sup>5</sup> Sometimes the reader has to “fill in” what the other caller is saying in order to understand the motivation behind the response. To better evaluate Peter’s comments, it is helpful to gather any possible background information on the recipient church and author. Unfortunately, Peter does not reveal the location of this ancient church, so we do not have any specific information about the original audience. But the epistle contains some clues about the problem that motivated Peter to write in the first place. By outlining the thought-flow of his letter (see table 1), it is possible to gain a reasonable understanding of the heresy that concerns him.

Peter opens his epistle with the customary elements, (1) identifying the writer, (2) identifying the recipients, and (3) an introductory greeting (1:1-2). Peter omits the usual “thanksgiving” portion of the letter and cuts to the core issue by exhorting the church to grow in their “godliness through knowledge” (1:3). New Testament scholar Douglas Moo comments that this section appears to be a “mini-sermon” in itself, complete with three points:<sup>6</sup>

1. God has given Christians all they need to become spiritually mature (vv. 3-4).
2. Christians must actively pursue spiritual maturity (vv. 5-9).
3. Christians must pursue spiritual maturity if they expect to be welcomed into God’s eternal kingdom (vv.10-11).

Peter’s call to spiritual maturity necessitates that Christians reflect certain virtues.

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your *faith goodness*; and to *goodness, knowledge*; and to *knowledge, self-control*; and to *self-control, perseverance*; and to *perseverance, godliness*; and to *godliness, brotherly kindness*; and to *brotherly kindness, love*. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they *will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge* of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:5-8, emphasis added).<sup>7</sup>

These verses bear a remarkable resemblance to Paul’s famous description of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). Peter’s discussion of godly character this early in his letter will later provide a counterpoint for discerning false teachers at the end of chapter 2.

By verse 9, Peter is already alluding to the trouble afoot in this congregation. “But if anyone does not have them, he is *nearsighted and blind*, and has *forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins*” (1:9, emphasis added). Apparently there was a group in this church who had, practically

speaking, nullified their redemption in Christ. At this point, Peter does not reveal a full explanation for the motivation behind either his exhortation or his warning, but clearly his intent is pastoral. He wants God’s people to examine themselves and make their “calling and election sure” so that they will not be led astray (1:10-15). Peter sends this warning as a kind of “last will and testament” as his death seems to be imminent (1:12-15).<sup>8</sup>

The next major section turns to doctrinal problems. Peter begins by “refreshing” the memories of these Christians about the empirical foundation for the Christian faith. Christianity makes an intimate link between history and theology. God’s intervention in past human events provides the rational foundation to believe that he will intervene to keep his covenant promises in the future. At a foundational level, Christianity is based on the question: Does the Bible contain an accurate account of the experiences of those who witnessed past miracles?<sup>9</sup>

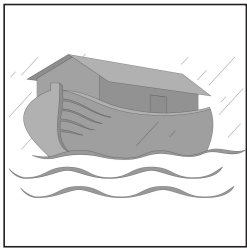
The Bible records the eyewitness testimonies of many, including Peter and the Old Testament prophets, who have preserved God’s words and deeds in history.

*We did not follow cleverly invented stories* when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were *eyewitnesses* of his majesty.

### Breakdown of 2 Peter

- I. Opening of the letter
  - A. Greeting (1:1-2)
  - B. Exhortation to grow in godliness through knowledge (1:3-11)
  - C. Transition: Warning of his imminent death (1:12-15)
- II. Body of the letter: Responding to false teachers
  - A. Warning against false teachers (1:16-21)
  - B. Their coming predicted (2:1-3a)
  - C. Their judgment assured and the promise of rescue for the godly – historical examples (2:3b-9)
    1. Fallen angels
    2. Noah’s flood
    3. Sodom and Gomorrah
    4. The rescue of the righteous (Lot)
  - D. Their character described (2:10-22)
  - E. Christ’s Return: The final answer to scoffers (3:1-16)
    1. Three answers (3:5-9)
    2. Warning (3:10)
    3. Exhortation to live a righteous life in light of Christ’s return (3:11-16)
- III. Conclusion of the letter (3:17-18)

Table 1: Breakdown of 2 Peter



## Communication

### *The History of the Universe in a Nutshell: Reflections on 2 Peter 3*

For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” We ourselves *heard* this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that *no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation*. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:16–21, emphasis added).

Christian faith is not merely a religion of personal, subjective experience—although it certainly contains that component. It is grounded primarily in particular historical facts—God’s interventions in history—which provide us with the rational foundation for our hope that God will keep his future promises. And, this argument provides the framework for Peter’s response to the heresies afoot in this church in chapter 3.

Building on this foundation, Peter begins chapter 2 with a blunt warning about the future coming of false teachers who will deceive the body of Christ.

But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there *will be false teachers* among you. They *will secretly introduce destructive heresies*, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many *will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute*. In their greed these teachers *will exploit you* with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping (2 Peter 2:1–3).

Tragically, it appears the church is being thrown into confusion by these false teachers who originate from *within* the church itself (2 Peter 2:1, 21). However, it would seem at first glance that Peter’s repeated

use of the future tense in these verses contradicts his use of the present tense elsewhere (2 Peter 2:11, 17, 18) and his apparent knowledge of their character and teachings.

So, the question is, when will these “false teachers” come? Chapter 3 offers a possible explanation: the “scoffers” will come “in the last days” (3:3). The New Testament seems to suggest that the “last days” were inaugurated with the first coming of the Christ, not his second.

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but *in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son*, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe (Heb. 1:1–2, emphasis added).

Moo suggests that Peter’s statements at the beginning of chapter 2 are a paraphrase of the warnings of Christ about the coming of false Messiahs (Matt. 24:4–5, 10–11, 23–24; Mark 13:22).<sup>10</sup> Perhaps the bottom line is, these false teachers have arrived in Peter’s church and may continue to permeate Christianity throughout the church age.

Peter does not reveal much specific information about the content of these “destructive heresies.” However, the crux of what these false teachers are saying appears to center around their denial of the “sovereign Lord who bought them” (2 Peter 2:1) and that these heretics exploit vulnerable Christians with “made up” stories (2:3). The descriptors hint at the motivation behind Peter’s previous discussion in chapter 1 and bring the problem into sharper focus. Apparently, this church was wrestling with something akin to what John appears to be fighting in his first epistle, a denial of the Incarnation (1 John 1:1–4). Like John, Peter does not want the church to forget about the historical nature of the Christian faith. “*We did not follow cleverly invented stories* when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were *eyewitnesses* of his majesty” (2 Peter 1:16, emphasis added). Christianity is not based on esoteric, secret teaching or fabricated legends. It is based on publicly witnessed, historical facts. In other words, if we could build a time machine and reverse the hands of time to the first century, we would actually hear the words and witness the deeds of Jesus for ourselves.

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Despite the presence of these false teachers, Peter assures the church that God's judgment is *certain*. He then gives three concrete examples of God's wrath against the ungodly—the fallen angels, Noah's flood, and Sodom and Gomorrah (2:4–10a). Equally certain, however, is God's preservation of the righteous. In this case, God rescues Lot from the midst of judgment (2:7). This principle of judgment and preservation is revisited in chapter 3.

Peter uses the latter part of chapter 2 to paint a rather unflattering profile of these heretics. Although they enjoy a degree of popularity within the Body of Christ (2:2), Peter piles up his warning with harsh descriptors. These false teachers are motivated by and have become experts at greed (2:3, 14). They follow the "corrupt desire of the flesh" (2:10).<sup>11</sup> They despise authority (2:10) and blaspheme on "matters they do not understand" (2:12). The result is that they have done "harm" to the Body of Christ (2:13). Their idea of "pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight" (2:13). Their "eyes are full of adultery" (2:14).<sup>12</sup> They "never stop sinning" (2:14) and they "seduce"<sup>13</sup> the doctrinally "unstable" or immature (2:14). Clearly, false teaching is not the only problem. Not only do these heretics fail to practice the Christian virtues outlined in Peter's opening exhortation (1:5–8), they have become spiritually "near-sighted and blind" and voided their redemption in Christ (1:9). Peter's description certainly harkens the reader to Paul's description of the "works of the flesh" (Gal. 5:19–21). The fate of those who introduce these "destructive heresies" into the church is doom. The "blackest darkness is reserved for them" (2:17), which could very well be a reference to hell.

## God's Interventions

This preliminary groundwork provides the context for taking a closer look at chapter 3. Based on the previous discussion, it seems reasonable to conclude that these "scoffers" are the same ones introducing "destructive heresies" into the church in chapter 2.

First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "*Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.*" But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness.

He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare (2 Peter 3:3–10, emphasis added).

In addition to undermining the Incarnation, these false teachers apparently deny the second coming of Christ (3:4) and the impending judgment of God against the sins of the world (3:10). Mocking the faith of Christians, these false teachers ask, "Where is this 'coming' he promised?" They support their position with a kind of naturalism that ridicules divine intervention in human history. "Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."<sup>14</sup>

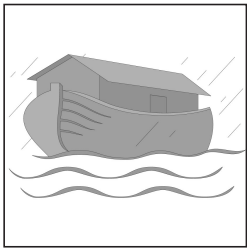
Peter counteracts the naturalism of these heretics and buttresses his argument about the certainty of God's future judgment with two historical examples where God intervened. This brings our discussion about the historical nature of the early chapters of Genesis into sharper focus. Peter answers these false teachers by harkening the reader back to the early pages of Genesis (3:5–7).

But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the *earth was formed out of water and by water*. By these *waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed*. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men (2 Peter 3:5–7, emphasis added).

In addition to their denial of God's future intervention, apparently these same "scoffers" also deny God's past intervention in the antediluvian world. Although some have used 2 Peter 3:5 as the basis for proposing creative theories about the earth being created out of water, this reasoning need not be the case. Peter does not use the verb *ktizo* ("to create") but says instead that "long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed [*synistemai*] out of water and with water." This verse most likely is a reference to Gen. 1:2, which describes the primordial earth as covered with water (cf. Ps. 104:6–9; Prov. 8:27–29).

The second historical event cited by Peter is Noah's flood. Peter paints it as a type or shadow of what is to come in the final judgment. In Noah's day, God's judgment came in a flood. His second judgment will be with fire. Just as with the earlier example of the rescue of Lot from the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Flood account gives us a picture of both God's wrath against the wicked and his provision of the ark as a life preserver for the righteous.

Without making too much of the phrase "the world of that time," it seems that Peter may even be offering a



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*Peter counteracts the naturalism of these heretics and buttresses his argument about the certainty of God's future judgment ... by harkening the reader back to the early pages of Genesis (3:5–7). ... According to Peter, ... if God intervened in the past, then he will most assuredly keep his promise to return for his people and judge the wicked.*

qualifier which is more consistent with an interpretation of the Noah narrative as being geographically limited in scope.<sup>15</sup> It is possible that Peter may be trying to distinguish his world (the Roman Empire, stretching at that time from Spain to India) from Noah's world (the Mesopotamian region). Even if the local flood interpretation of verse 6 is faulty, the theological bottom line of the Noah story, according to Peter, is this: if God intervened in the past, then he will most assuredly keep his promise to return for his people and judge the wicked. You can bank on it.

Peter's second argument against the false teachers' scoffing at the "delay" of the Lord's coming stems from Ps. 90:4: "For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night."<sup>16</sup> This rationale is a primitive way of recognizing that God does not reckon time the same way that mortals do. Through the lens of modern science, we have gained a more sophisticated understanding of the universe and time. The mathematical theorems of General Relativity demonstrate that all space, time, matter, and energy had a beginning and that the universe needs a transcendent Beginner.<sup>17</sup> These parameters are at least consistent with the picture of God and time described in the Bible. God transcends both this universe and time. Because God stands outside of time, he is not constrained by our universe's linear dimension of time, where time cannot be stopped or reversed. God's return only seems delayed from our limited perspective of this space-time continuum. From God's perspective, time is irrelevant.

This view leads us to a third response to the scoffers' argument. The "delay" of Jesus' second coming is actually a sign of his grace, not his powerlessness or apathy. Once the Day of Judgment comes, all opportunity for repentance is lost. Thus, God patiently waits until all of his people have come to faith.<sup>18</sup> In the meantime, God tolerates the sins of the wicked (cf. Rom. 9:22).

Peter ends this section with a warning for the false teachers (2 Pet. 3:10). The day of the Lord will come suddenly, like a thief in the night. This analogy echoes the teaching of Jesus (cf. Matt. 24:42–44; Luke 12:39) and is used elsewhere in the New Testament as a

picture of his second coming (cf. 1 Thess. 5:2; Rev. 3:3; 16:15). Peter vividly describes the ending of this creation. "The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare" (2 Pet. 3:10). The "heavens" (*ouranos*) can refer to anything from the sky; to the place of the sun, moon, and stars; and to the abode of God. In combination with verse 13, it would seem that the second definition fits the best.<sup>19</sup> In New Testament times, the "elements" (*stoicheia*) were air, earth, fire, and water.<sup>20</sup>

Peter offers a helpful correction to a number of different errors, prevalent in his day, about the next creation. For example, Aristotle and his followers believed that the universe was eternal. The Epicureans were the naturalists of Peter's day, denying that God intervened in the world and teaching that matter was indestructible and the universe was infinite. The Stoics believed that fire was eternal and that the universe would periodically be resolved into fire and formed again in a cycle of ages.<sup>21</sup> In our own day, the heretical sect known as the Watchtower society (Jehovah's Witnesses) assert that this earth will one day be restored to an Edenic ideal, where humans and animals will live for eternity in peace. The Latter-Day Saints posit the eternal state on planetary homes spread throughout the universe. But Peter corrects all of these errors. This cosmos will one day be rolled up like a scroll (cf. Is. 34:4; Rev. 6:14), making way for a new heavens and new earth (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1), where the righteous will dwell.<sup>22</sup>

## Concluding Thoughts

2 Peter 3 offers a theology of the beginning and ending of the universe in a nutshell. The author touches on several key themes related to redemptive history, which might be summarized this way:

1. God created the universe.
2. God has intervened at certain key points throughout history.
3. Jesus' return will be sudden.
4. God's future judgment against the sins of the world is certain.
5. God will spare the righteous from eternal judgment.
6. The universe and its elements will one day pass away.

7. God will create a new heavens and a new earth.
8. Knowledge about the end of the world should result in God's people living righteous lives.

We have observed that the author of 2 Peter has a high concern for the historical nature of the Christian faith, which brings us back to consider an answer to our original question: Does the Bible view the early chapters of Genesis, creation in particular, as preserving actual historical events? As we have seen, the author of 2 Peter uses the events of creation and Noah's flood to build his case that God has the power to intervene in his creation at any time. These historical actions in the past provide God's people with the assurance that the Creator will intervene again in the future. Based on this observation, it appears as though the author considers the events in the early chapters of Genesis to not only be historical, but to also provide the very foundation for our eternal hope. In short, the biblical events concerning the beginning of the universe provide the historical and rational foundation to believe in the events for the end of the universe, which in turn provides a practical motivation for the Christian life.

Secondly, creation and Noah's flood, along with the events of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus all seem to be on the same historical plane for the author of 2 Peter. It does not appear that there is any qualitative difference between believing in the Incarnation and believing in the creation account of Genesis 1 and 2. They are all considered factual events in redemptive history. Conversely, it would seem that removing the historical content of the early chapters of Genesis would undermine our confidence in a literal second coming of Christ at a rather foundational level. After all, if the events of creation and Noah's flood are merely poetry or literary conventions or mythology, then on what basis can we believe that God's intervention in the future will be a literal historical event?

I am not suggesting that efforts like Walton's to probe the parallels between the Genesis creation account and other ancient near eastern myths ought to be discontinued. Such research provides an intriguing window into the historical context of Genesis 1. And it is certainly possible that the ancient Israelites understood the created order in a rather primitive, scientifically unsophisticated way. Maybe they really did believe the sky was a solid dome, as Walton suggests. I am simply asking that scholars exercise caution not to allow the human author's intent to so narrowly define the interpretive possibilities that the supernatural Author's intent becomes obscured. The Bible itself seems to indicate that the biblical authors did not always know the extent of the "mysteries" they were preserving. This point is explicitly stated concerning the events surrounding the life of Jesus (1 Peter 1:10-12). Is it at least possible, then, that even if the author of Genesis was not completely aware of the sophisticated scientific implications of his words, the supernatural Author was?

Certainly, attempts to integrate the Bible with the discoveries of modern science ought to be done with great care and include a high regard toward the author's intent, being careful to take the rules of genre into account. It is a delicate process as the modern reader interacts with the ancient text, its author, and audience, in an attempt to spiral closer and closer to the truth. And the Galileo incident provides a powerful reminder to proceed with interpretive caution. But it is hard to imagine how a Christian would be able to mount any sort of rigorous apologetic for the accuracy of the Bible if it does not contain accurate descriptions of the created order, especially when the Bible itself seems to so closely link history with theology (see 1 Cor. 15:14, 17).

For the author of 2 Peter, however, the events of redemptive history are not "cleverly devised tales," but rather form a primary motivation for holy living.

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming ... since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him (3:11-14).

Not only are God's people called to guard the correct doctrine of the faith, but they are also called to live mature and holy lives. In a sense, Christians have skipped to the back of the book and we know the end of the story. God calls his people to resist false teachers by growing in their knowledge of Christ and living righteously. And in the meantime, God's people rest in this assurance because of his actions in history. ✱

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>"Interview with Simon Conway Morris," *Creation Update* (Pasadena, CA: Reasons To Believe), February 24, 2005.

<sup>2</sup>I had the privilege of discussing these issues in person with Dr. Walton on February 10, 2005, on the campus of Wheaton College. I was interviewing Dr. Walton for a documentary for Reasons To Believe. I found him to be one of the most thought-provoking, well-spoken and gracious people I have ever met. I credit him for making me think more deeply about these issues, which in turn forced me to refine my own views and eventually lead to the writing of this paper.

<sup>3</sup>This issue is thoughtfully discussed, among other places, in Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 366-9; and E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (Hartford, CT: Yale University Press, 1973).

<sup>4</sup>John H. Walton and Andrew E. Hill, *Old Testament Today: A Journey from Original Meaning to Contemporary Significance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 54-9, 89, 108-13.

<sup>5</sup>Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 45-77.

Recently, there has been increased discussion among New Testament scholars about 2 Peter and Jude being Christian examples of a literary genre called "Testament" which was common during the inter-testamental period. Anonymous writers would use the names of famous Old Testament figures to write death bed declarations. Famous Jewish examples of this type of literature include the

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Testament of Adam, Testament of Enoch, Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, Testament of Job, Testament of Moses and Testament of Abraham. The intent of these writers was not to deceive readers, but rather to pay honor to these great heroes of the covenant. It has been suggested by some scholars that the books of 2 Peter and Jude were written by someone in the early church who was continuing this tradition by writing a letter in the name of the apostles after their death. By writing under a pseudonym, the author would have adopted a popular literary device of the day that people would have immediately recognized for what it was. Although it is certainly possible to hold this view and still affirm that the Bible is without error, this essay is written from the perspective that the author of 2 Peter is the apostle Peter himself, written before his martyrdom in Rome at the hands of Nero (c. AD 64–65). This is primarily because the author cites himself as an eyewitness of Jesus' death (1:13–14) and transfiguration (1:16–18), and the rather pivotal nature of his polemic resting on the issue of eyewitness testimony. For more about the literary genre of "Testament," see J. M. Knight, "Testament of Abraham," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley Porter (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 1188–9; R. P. Splinter, "Testament of Job," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, 1189–92; D. A. deSilva, "Testament of Moses," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, 1192–9; H. C. Kee, "Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, 1200–5.

<sup>6</sup>Douglas J. Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 41.

<sup>7</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all biblical quotes are from the *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1985).

<sup>8</sup>Some scholars have argued that 2 Pet. 1:12–15, in addition to other key verses, provides evidence that Peter incorporates literary features consistent with the "testament" genre at least to some degree. See R. J. Bauckham, "2 Peter," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, ed. Ralph Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 923–4.

<sup>9</sup>For a more complete explanation of this concept, see Krista Bontrager, *Reflections on Mel Gibson's The Passion of the Christ*, audiobook (Glendora, CA: Reasons To Believe, 2004).

<sup>10</sup>Some may question whether Peter could be quoting Jesus in the Olivet Discourse because they think that Jesus' predictions apply only to what will happen at the end of history, right before his second return. Moo argues, however, that although the climax of the discourse does indeed describe Jesus' return in glory (Matt. 24:29–31), the earlier portion describes what will happen before his return. Given that Jesus said that even he did not "know the day or hour" of his return (Matt. 24:36), it is possible that Jesus (in his humanity) did not know how much time would elapse before his advent. See Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary*, 91–2, 95. See also D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *Matthew, Mark, Luke*, vol. 1 of *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982).

<sup>11</sup>Moo asserts that the NIV's translation is too mild. A literal rendering is "'going after flesh in a passionate longing for defilement.' The reference is to sexual sin, probably including, in light of Peter's reference to Sodom and Gomorrah in verse 6, homosexuality." Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary*, 107.

<sup>12</sup>Moo interprets this to mean they are "addicted to sex." Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary*, 126.

<sup>13</sup>Moo points out that the Greek word of "seduce" has its roots in the "world of hunting and fishing; it suggests the bait used to lure a fish to the hook or an animal to the trap." However, by the time of Peter, it had become used generally to refer to any kind of moral temptation. Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary*, 126.

<sup>14</sup>Based on how it is used in other New Testament passages (e.g., John 6:31, Acts 3:13, Rom. 9:5, and Heb. 1:1), the term "fathers" most likely refers to the Old Testament saints, as opposed to first generation Christians as some have argued. Additionally, what the NIV translates as "death" literally means "fell asleep" which is a New Testament metaphor for the death of believers (cf. Acts 7:60; 1 Thess. 4:13–14).

<sup>15</sup>Hugh Ross, *The Genesis Question: Scientific Advances and the Accuracy of Genesis*, 2d ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2001), 147.

<sup>16</sup>Although some scholars have tried to use Ps. 90:4 and 2 Pet. 3:8 to support the perspective that the "days" in Genesis 1 could be longer than 24 hours, this assertion may be groundless. While Ps. 90:4 and 2 Pet. 3:8 mention the word "day" as being a thousand years, the frame of reference seems to be from God's point of view in the heavenly realm. In contrast, day-age creationists such as Hugh Ross argue that the frame of reference in Genesis 1 is from the perspective of a person on the surface of the earth (verse 2). These differing frames of reference may make Ps. 90:4 and 2 Pet. 3:8 exegetically irrelevant to Genesis 1.

<sup>17</sup>Hugh Ross, *The Creator and the Cosmos: How the Greatest Scientific Discoveries of the Century Reveal God*, 3rd ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2001), 23–4.

<sup>18</sup>This verse has been the source of debate between Calvinists and Arminians. The way that I have phrased my understanding of this verse tips my hand as to my personal leanings toward Calvinism.

<sup>19</sup>Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary*, 189–90.

<sup>20</sup>Jerome H. Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Random House, Anchor Bible, 1993), 243.

<sup>21</sup>Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 731.

<sup>22</sup>It is difficult to understand how Henry Morris's view that the stars will be eternal harmonizes with this interpretation of 2 Pet. 3:13. Even more curious is his apparent belief that Christians will abide with the stars in eternity. He says:

Evolutionary astronomers believe that stars evolve through a long cycle of stellar life and death, but this idea contradicts God's revelation that He has created this physical universe to last forever. Speaking of these stellar heavens, the majestic 148th Psalm, centered on God's creation, says that God "hath also established them for ever and ever: He hath made a decree which shall not pass" (Ps. 148:6) ... In fact, the earth and its atmospheric heaven (not the sidereal heaven) one day will "pass away" (Matt. 24:35), and then will be transformed by God into "new heavens and a new earth" (2 Pet. 3:13) which will never pass away. But the infinite cosmos of space and time, created in the beginning by God, was created to last forever ... The stars are innumerable, each one unique, each one with a divine purpose, and they will shine forever. We can never reach them in this life, but in our glorified bodies, we shall have endless time to explore the infinite heavens.

See similar statements in: Henry M. Morris, "The Stars of Heaven," *Impact*, no. 10 (January 1974); —, "The Remarkable Re-Birth of Planet Earth," *Impact*, no. 63 (September 1978); —, "The Stars Forever," *Days of Praise* (April 28, 1996); —, "The Coming Big Bang," *Back to Genesis*, no. 101 (May 1997); and —, "Forever and Ever," *Days of Praise* (December 27, 2003).

### ASA to Meet with CiS

The American Scientific Affiliation will meet with the Christians in Science (CiS) at the University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, Scotland, on August 3–5, 2007. The theme of the joint meeting is "New Frontiers in Science and Religion."

Members of the CiS organizing committee are: John Bryant, chairman; Denis Alexander, Ruth Bancewicz; Caroline Berry; and Hugh Reynolds.

**Mark your calendar.  
Watch for more details.**