

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 30, Number 34

August 25, 2013



God's Word Cannot be More Sure than it is

We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts. (2 Peter 1:19, KJV 1900)

After giving us a first-hand perspective of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter opens our present study with a comparison. Peter had no doubts about what he saw and heard in the mountain. The event was burned into his memory. Despite that vivid and accurate recall of the Transfiguration event, Peter doesn't hesitate to tell us that we have something even surer than personal experience on which to base our faith. Although some of the New Testament was written at the time of Peter's second letter, it had not yet been compiled into a collection of writings under one cover as we have it today. Likely, most of the New Testament letters that were written at the time of Peter's writing were still in the hands of the individuals and churches to which they were addressed. Thus, Peter's "...more sure word of prophecy" is a reference to the Old Testament, especially to its prophecies regarding Jesus and His coming.

In an age so rife with over-active imaginations and people trying to validate the predictions of various modern-day "Prophets," the idea of authentic "Prophecy," of describing in accurate details people and events that shall not unfold for centuries, is held in high suspicion. However, in our Bible, we have a collection of "Books" written across fifteen centuries by over forty men from all walks of life, and yet these books mesh into a cohesive, non-contradictory whole that, in itself, represents something of a miracle. If you took a list of over forty men from one walk of life, one educational background, in one generation, and asked them to write on just one topic familiar to them, would you see the same cohesive harmony in their writings? Not at all, you'd see a mixture of ideas that often would show little or no regard or harmony with another person's writings.

If we were to find a book, an ancient book, that contained numerous prophecies, often giving very specific details about the future event described, and, if we were to research each prophecy and discovered that every single prophecy came to pass exactly as described, how might we react to such a book? How could we react to it other than to affirm that something beyond our grasp must have been at work in this book's writing? And that is precisely what we have in our Bible. For centuries, critics have hammered at the Bible, occasionally claiming

that they finally found a contradiction, an unfulfilled or mis-fulfilled prophecy. However, over time, these claimed errors have been discredited, and the accuracy of Biblical prophecy affirmed. Consider just a few of the more obvious prophecies from the Old Testament that were fulfilled by Jesus.

1. He would be born in Bethlehem, Ephratah. (Micah 5:2; written ca 700 BC) Jesus was born in that little village.
2. He would be sold by a traitor to His teachings for thirty pieces of silver. (Zechariah 11:13; written ca 500 BC) Judas, one of Jesus' twelve followers, betrayed Him for thirty pieces of silver.
3. He would be crucified; His executioners would pierce His hands and His feet. (Psalm 22:16; written ca 1000 BC)
4. His executioners would mock Him by giving Him vinegar and gall to drink. (Psalm 69:21)

This list could go on and on. However, as we examine the pages of the New Testament, we discover that each prophecy contained in the Old Testament came to pass exactly as prophesied.

Someone has computed the mathematical probability of a few Biblical prophecies being fulfilled in one man, and the result is amazing.

Just to give you an example, the probability of Jesus Christ fulfilling **just EIGHT** of the Bible prophecies concerning Him would be 1 in 10,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000. And this number just keeps on growing and growing as you add more prophecies to the list. The Bible is truly the Word of God.¹

Bible students have listed at least one hundred twenty five Old Testament prophecies that Jesus precisely fulfilled. What logical conclusion must we reach from such information? Surely, this evidence affirms in terms beyond our comprehension that our Bible is a supernatural book, a book whose existence and whose contents came from God, not

¹ <http://www.end-times-prophecy.org/bible-prophecy-and-probability.html>

from those forty some men who wrote the individual books that it contains.

All of this tangible evidence is powerful and convincing. However, Peter doesn't cite a single mathematical statistic. He reduces his testimony to the accuracy and the divine origin of Scripture to a very personal point of view. ***What God says in Scripture is "...more sure..." than what he personally witnessed on the Mount of Transfiguration!***

Why is it that two individuals of similar intelligence and background will read the Bible, but one will ridicule it and the other wholly believe it? Both read the same book. Both read it from similar personal background and intelligence. I suggest that factors outside personal background and intelligence must explain this difference. We sometimes—often—confine a Bible term to a rather narrow scope. I suggest that Scripture's use of the word "Faith" is far broader than most commentaries, doctrinal texts, and preachers depict it to be. When Paul (I believe the human author of the Book of Hebrews) defined faith, the only time we see an inspired definition of the word, he didn't impose such a narrow limitation on the word.

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1, KJV 1900)

Why does one person facing a potential life-threatening illness ignore the black crepe of the doctor's prognosis and believe that he/she will survive—and does survive? Why does another person with the same diagnosis crumble under the realization of the diagnosis and die? Of course, many other scenarios also exist. For example, just before her thirtieth birthday, my wife was diagnosed with Stage Four metastatic cancer. That diagnosis effectively means go home and get your house in order; you will almost certainly not survive. And that prognosis did indeed crush her for a season. Yet over forty years later, she is alive; that cancer never returned, thank the Lord.

What is the point? Paul makes it. For Paul and the other inspired writers of Scripture, "Hope" did not mean wishful thinking for the impossible and unlikely. His definition of faith reminds us that Biblical "Hope" stands on the solid "Substance" of faith, a trait that comes from God, not from our happy, optimistic DNA. Before the end of this chapter, Paul will remind us that the many Old Testament examples of faith that he names—and many that he leaves unnamed—looked forward to something in the future, something that would only validate their faith if it came to pass. He then claims fulfillment, "...that they without us should not be made perfect." (Hebrews 11:40b) As we witness one fulfilled prophecy from the Old Testament after another, we validate the faith of those ancient believers in God who believed His prophecies and died believing them. Every fulfilled

prophecy that we uncover or witness from Scripture validates the faith of those who believed God's promise, sometimes long centuries before God fulfilled the prophecy. True, God-given prophecy validates the faithfulness of God in which all true faith is anchored. It is God's faithfulness that gives "**substance**" to Biblical faith.

...the evidence of things not seen. Paul further expands the scope of Biblical faith. He does not make faith so broad as to include everything unseen, but he does expand the principle to "things" that we cannot see with the eye or examine in a scientific laboratory. Paul will illustrate this principle several times in this chapter by his Old Testament human examples of faith. Consider—

1. Verse 3, creation. Faith doesn't explain the origin, but it does anchor itself in the premise that God is Creator of the material world. It didn't occur by a cosmic accident or explosion. No scientist or philosopher can take you to a laboratory where they can show you the exact process by which creation occurred. It remains "...not seen."
2. Verses 13-15. Like those examples from the Old Testament, our embracing and believing firmly in God's faithfulness, even to prophesied future events that shall not occur till long after we have died, makes us "...pilgrims and strangers" in this world. We may never see all of His promises fulfilled in our lifetime, but we shall go to our end firmly believing in His faithfulness that shall eventually, in His time and way, bring them to pass.
3. Verse 27. Moses, a man who grew up in the house of the pharaoh of Egypt, was confronted by God who was greater than any of the imaginary deities of Egypt. What prompted Moses to forsake the palace of Egypt to lead a band of slaves out of Egypt to a country that he had never seen or known by a path that he had never traveled? He was empowered to make this break with Egypt "...as seeing him who is invisible."

Scripture abundantly teaches that God reveals Himself to a person long before that person knows or understands anything of spiritual substance about Him. In that life-changing revelation called the new birth, wholly brought about by God who accomplishes the work as sovereignly as the blowing wind (John 3:8), God introduces a thing that Scripture calls faith. And He uses this faith to bring forth the witness to His people when they encounter Scripture, that they are reading His words from Him in this "Holy book," this "oracle" from God. God's personal witness in Scripture, for Peter, was more reliable than Peter's own eyewitness experience and observation. So it should be to us as well. More to come.

The Anvil

Last eve I paused beside a blacksmith's door,
And heard the anvil ring the vesper chime;
Then looking in, I saw upon the floor,
Old hammers worn with beating years of time.
"How many anvils have you had," said I,
"To wear and batter all these hammers so?"
"Just one," said he, and then with twinkling eye,
"The anvil wears the hammers out, you know."
"And so," I thought, "The Anvil of God's Word
For ages skeptic blows have beat upon,
Yet, though the noise of falling blows was heard,
The Anvil is unharmed, the hammers gone."
Author Unknown

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Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
Joseph R. Holder Pastor