

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## Scripture's Faithful Work

*But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. 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 longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:7-9, KJV 1900)*

Peter doesn't try to frame the most cranial expose of the error that he encounters and uses to illustrate the false prophet's tactics. He follows the simplest possible arguments. And he exclusively uses Scripture to refute the error. At the first casual glance, the errant idea seems fairly simple and innocent. However, it contradicts Scripture at every point, and Peter exposes those contradictions to expose the gravity of the error and to refute it. We should learn from Peter's lesson when we must confront and refute error in our time.

The idea that nothing has changed in recorded time, "...all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation..." implies that nothing shall change in the future. Peter first refutes the basic premise of past sameness with the Biblical truth of creation and the flood. He then turns to the deepest implication of the error. If nothing has changed, the error implies that nothing shall change in the future. This conclusion wholly rejects the central and essential Biblical doctrine of the Second Coming and the resurrection of the dead, along with all that Scripture teaches will follow.

*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)*

Peter joins Paul in his uncompromising respect for, and belief in the teachings of Scripture. The false prophet who is most successful in deceiving people and gaining followers to his ideas doesn't outright deny Scripture. He follows the great seducer's strategy in Genesis 3. He questions our simple, straightforward understanding of God's word. "Yea, hath God said...." He assaults the simple teachings of Scripture by imposing his convoluted ideas onto Scripture. To use Paul's analogy in this passage, he incorrectly or "un-rightly" divides the word of truth. To divide Scripture improperly morphs its meaning into a word of error, the false prophet's objective. The words translated "rightly dividing" come from a word in common first century Greek language that literally meant "To cut straight." Think of Paul's secular vocation, making and selling tents. If a man hoped to be successful in selling his

tents, he must cut the fabric to a correct pattern that will shape the final product, the tent that he sells, into a usable product for the buyer. If a potential buyer looked at Paul's fabric and observed sloppy, uneven cuts that could not possibly be pulled together into the tent that he needed, the potential buyer would walk away and buy his tent from a more skilled tent-maker. Sadly, in the case of Biblical teaching, the naive "tent buyer," the unsuspecting believer, will often "Listen" more to the appearance of sincerity in the false prophet than to his deceitful ideas. Eventually, this sincere "shopper" will "buy the tent" of error, believing very sincerely that he has purchased a quality "tent" that will work exactly as specified when he needs it. Often, much later, this sad, but sincere, believer will discover that the "tent" that he bought doesn't work at all, leading him to disillusionment and disappointment. By this time, he has sadly "Bought the tent" and may not associate the current disappointment with the original "Tent salesman." He may blame himself, thinking that he simply didn't read the directions or use the tent properly. While the smooth-talking, skilled false prophet may never face the fruits of his error with people, he shall surely face the Lord's righteous judgment, and he cannot twist God's word when he faces God Himself in judgment. Notice Paul's clear point in his teaching, "Study to shew thyself approved **unto God**...." Just as the faithful servant will strive and labor tediously to "Sell" only a usable, high-quality "Tent" to his hearers, the false prophet will work to sell his inferior product. The buyer may never realize that the false prophet "Sold him a bill of goods," but God shall know and bring every false prophet to His judgment seat to account for his actions. You will notice that Peter addresses the Lord's righteous judgment against the wicked before he moves on to the Lord's blessed faithfulness to His beloved children.

Peter then shifts our attention to the obvious question that the false prophet in this error used to create a show of credibility to his incredible story. Even as Peter wrote these words, the world that God created had existed for a very long time. Generation after generation came and went. Cemeteries grew with each passing generation.

There was no resurrection, no universal trumpet or shout, and no righteous judgment of all humanity. A false prophet will not use unbelievable ideas to deceive people. He most often will use something obvious, but he will impose his twisted interpretation onto it.

Peter reminds his readers that God's righteous judgment, though presently delayed, is no less certain. If God in Scripture teaches us that He shall come in visible form to end the present material world, to raise the dead, and to judge them by His righteous judgment, that fact is no less true because it has not yet occurred than if it had actually occurred yesterday. All Biblical truth, including the Lord's repeated promise that He shall return, raise the dead, and take His redeemed with their now-resurrected bodies, into eternal glory with Him, relies on the faithfulness of God. Peter takes us down this precise path with his rebuttal of the error. Our God is not subject to time. He doesn't grow old. He doesn't lose His sharp memory or forget what He promised. One day from now or a thousand years from now makes no difference whatever. If He tells us in Scripture that He shall return--and He does--He shall return. He never fails to keep His promises.

*The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness.* God is never "slack" concerning His promise. Peter states an obvious truth that we might apply to every promise that the Lord makes in Scripture, but, in this context, Peter uses a singular form, "promise," not "promises." He is dealing with one particular promise that the Lord makes in Scripture. The false prophet's false teaching rejects this promise and therefore contradicts Scripture and impugns God's faithfulness. The false prophet's idea implies that God is either slack, unconcerned that He made a promise that He doesn't now intend to keep, or it denies that He made the promise at all. Either way the false prophet's idea contradicts God's promise of faithfulness in Scripture regarding His return and final righteous judgment. The Lord promised in Scripture that He would return, raise the dead, end this world as we now know it, and give His beloved children eternal rest. The false prophet implies that God didn't really mean what He said in Scripture.

*...but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.* Notice Peter's point; God's longsuffering is not general, but specific, "...**to us-ward**..." God's delay in returning is directly related to His chosen people. His objective is that God is "...not willing that any should perish." If the Lord chose to return immediately, rather than in His appointed, though long-delayed, time, some of His elect who were not yet born—or born again—would perish by never coming into existence at all. He'd return and end this world before they existed. He intentionally delays His return until all whom He loved and chose in His beloved Son are born into this world, and born of the Holy Spirit. They will

"...come to repentance." That is, they will experience the miraculous change of new birth before the Second Coming. Notice that Peter does not write that all "...should repent," the typical interpretation forced upon this verse. Peter's emphasis deals with God's faithfulness, not with His people's obedience. Some may view the point as overly technical, but it is no accident that Peter did not write that "...all should come to repent." If our repentance had been his intended point, the verse would read in this way. By using "...come to repentance," I suggest that Peter is referring to the change that God faithfully makes in each of His beloved children in the new birth, not to the change that we are commanded to make after the new birth.

Occasionally you will read or hear some who suggest that Paul, Peter, and all of the apostles, along with the first generation church, were dreadfully deceived regarding the Second Coming, thinking that it would occur in their lifetime. At least some who try to force this misunderstanding of the Lord's faithful promise onto the apostles may well hold close to similar ideas as the false prophets that Peter refutes in this passage. Ask them to tell you what the Bible teaches about the Second Coming, and they will often tell you that the Bible says little to nothing at all about such an event. When I hear such incredible claims about the Bible, I always want to ask, "What Bible are you reading? Mine has much to say about that glorious event."

This passage in no way suggests that Peter believed that the Second Coming was imminent, that it would occur during his lifetime. He fully understood that it was far in the future, and he taught his readers and us that the precise time of that glorious event is immaterial. God's faithfulness in bringing it at His time and in His way should be our constant mindset. Paul's rebuke of the Thessalonians, especially Second Thessalonians, likewise affirms that Paul did not mistakenly expect the Second Coming in his lifetime. He confronted and rebuked the Thessalonians for holding that precise view; he didn't affirm that their idea was correct. Paul's "Thief in the night" analogy in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 also affirms his right belief that the Second Coming 1) is far in the future, and 2) that it shall come wholly unexpected, even by believers. The consistent teaching of New Testament writers regarding our attitude toward the Lord's final return is that we should live as if it is tomorrow, while patiently waiting for Him to come at His time, be it tomorrow or a thousand years still future to us. With this view, we may comfort each other. (1 Thessalonians 4:18)

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Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor