

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

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## Second Coming Described

*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. (2 Peter 3:10, KJV 1900)*

You need not read modern fiction to learn the truth regarding the Second Coming. In fact, the leading fictional work written by its author to stage his views regarding the Second Coming is as fictional regarding its allegations for the Second Coming as its fictional plot in the story line. We would honor the testimony of Scripture far more if we abandoned "*Left Behind*" and embraced Scripture's "None Overlooked." The foundational idea of *Left Behind* had no basis in historical Christian belief until the early nineteenth century, around 1827-1830, making it too little and too late to claim credible historical grounds for Biblical truth. Scripture never implies that God intended to leave His people and His New Testament church in the dark on a central truth for almost two thousand years. Quite the opposite. (Ephesians 3:21; He can only receive His deserved glory in the church throughout all ages, no excluded two thousand years of ignorance, if His church understands and proclaims His truth)

*Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen. (Revelation 1:7; there is nothing clandestine or secret about His appearance. Every eye, even those who crucified Him, along with all of earth's inhabitants, shall see Him)*

Do not disconnect this section of Peter's writing from the first part of the chapter. He continues his theme of refuting the false prophet's denial of the Second Coming by a delightful and edifying explanation of that event.

*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night....* Paul also used the "thief in the night" analogy in his Second Coming teaching. (1 Thessalonians 5:1-11) A simple study of Paul's teaching in this context will affirm as clearly as our present lesson that neither Paul nor Peter believed that the Second Coming would occur during their lifetime, a false idea imposed onto Scripture by a few Second Coming deniers or discounters of our day. A burglar doesn't send you a registered letter, telling you exactly when and how he plans to break into your house and steal your valuables. His whole modus operandi depends on the element of

surprise. A few years ago, a leading radio teacher on Family Radio, a Christian radio network, loudly predicted that God had revealed to him the precise date of the Second Coming. When challenged by Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians 5, he claimed that unbelievers will be surprised by the Second Coming, but that believers will know the precise time. During this era, I met and had some interesting conversations with one of this man's followers. In one of our last discussions, I asked the man the direct question, "If the predicted date comes and goes with no Second Coming, where does this leave you and your followers?" The man directly responded, "Then X (the leader's name) is a false prophet." Of course, when a false prophet makes predictions that fail, he always finds ways to rationalize his problem and keep his disciples under his influence. False prophets who predict exact dates for the Second Coming are the easiest of all errors to refute. Do nothing! Just wait for the date to come and go. If the Second Coming occurs, praise the Lord. We all go home to glory with Him. If it does not occur, you know that the man failed the Biblical truth test, and his teachings should be rejected, along with him if he refuses to repent. (Titus 3:10-11)

Paul's and Peter's "thief in the night" analogy affirms a simple truth. Neither man believed that the Second Coming would occur during his lifetime. Neither man believed that he knew the precise time of that glorious event. Both men rejoiced at the certainty of the event, based on the Lord's faithfulness to His promise. (2 Peter 3:9-10) The consistent New Testament attitude toward the Second Coming, and one that we should adopt, lives to the glory of our God, as if that day is today, but expects it at some indefinite future time.

*...in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.* Nothing in these words remotely implies a secret event. If the whole material universe passes away with a "...great noise," I seriously doubt that anyone living at the time could possibly ignore the fact or not be aware of it. What Peter describes in these words is a literal description of a total meltdown of the entire material world. Likewise, Paul describes that

moment as coming "...with a shout," no different than Peter's "...great noise."

*For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. (1 Thessalonians 4:16)*

Over my lifetime, I have witnessed a number of wild—and unbiblical—predictions regarding the Second Coming. I grew up during the era immediately following World War II. In elementary school, our teachers routinely drilled us on what to do if a nuclear bomb exploded in the vicinity where we lived. We ducked under our desks and listened to our teachers rehearsing the drill two or three times a month. No surprise, during that era, a good number of well-meaning, but sadly ignorant Bible teachers loudly predicted that the world would come to an end by way of a nuclear war between the USA and Russia.

Another fairly common error in interpreting this passage concludes that the whole lesson is symbolic, not literal. The old heaven and earth that is dissolved "Represents" the Old Testament era and form of worship, and the new heaven and new earth "Represents" the New Testament gospel era. By his reference to both creation and the flood, Peter quite clearly intended to refer to the material world in which we live. So did the false prophet's "...things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." Nothing in this context would lead us to shift from the literal to a symbolic interpretation. The context continues to examine the dramatic change that shall occur in this material world at the Second Coming to refute the false prophet's "...things continue as they were..." error.

Scripture teaches that God consciously, purposefully, and intelligently created the material world in which we live. (Genesis 1-2) Scripture does not attempt to explain the scientific processes, but it clearly makes the point that this material universe had its beginning with God, not with a cosmic explosion and chaos that mysteriously produced order.

*Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. (Hebrews 11:3)*

Nothing in this verse or in Scripture suggests that Scripture explains the processes of creation beyond the details provided in the first two chapters of Genesis. But this verse affirms that faith, true, Biblical, godly, God-given faith, embraces the foundational truth that God created this world. Further, Scripture also affirms that He presently holds this material world together in its orderly form and processes.

*And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. (Colossians 1:17)*

The word translated "consist" in this verse literally means "...to bring together or hold together something in its proper or appropriate place or relationship..."<sup>1</sup> John 1:3 affirms this same truth. The mystical "glue" that holds this universe, along with all of its components, together in their orderly and constructive form is the Lord Jesus Christ.

We who believe in the testimony of Scripture regarding God's creation of this material universe should not overlook the obvious point. The unbelievers who tout science as contradicting and refuting our faith must embrace their beliefs regarding the origin of the universe no less by faith than we. Their cosmic "Big bang" is not going on today to be observed in a laboratory. They must embrace its existence as a matter of faith, scientific faith, but faith nonetheless.

If we follow Peter's contextual development of his teaching from the beginning of the chapter, this interpretation is the simplest and most natural interpretation available for the passage. Any other view must impose an unnatural and undocumented shift of focus and subject matter, something that the language of the context will not support.

We shall get to Peter's full explanation shortly. However, we should find great comfort in knowing from Scripture's revelation that our world shall not end in man-caused chaos or nuclear holocaust. The same God who created it shall in His time and way conclude it. Peter will weave this teaching seamlessly into his teaching of the Second Coming and our glorious eternity with our God and Savior.

On occasions in Scripture, God demonstrates His wrath in fire, something of a reminder of this final event. All the wickedness that appeared to succeed in its aims, all the secret sins that depraved sinners believed they indulged without any divine judgment or penalty shall be brought to light. God's wrath shall righteously deal with them all. However, Scripture is quite consistent in reminding believers in Christ that they have nothing to fear in that day. When Moses saw the fire burning, but not consuming the bush, he was struck with awe, but the fire in no way harmed him. We shall see Him and rejoice, not cower in mortal fear or cry out for the rocks to fall on us in that day. Come quickly, Lord Jesus.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church  
16434 Woodruff  
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor

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<sup>1</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 613.