

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

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## A Certain Promise

*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. 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 3:8–10, KJV 1900)*

Scripture often mentions God's promises (Plural), but our study passage refers to one particular promise. Notice that the word in this passage is singular, "promise," not "promises." Peter has one specific promise in mind as he writes this inspired text. Contextually, we have seen that he is teaching on the Second Coming and refuting the error of those who denied that it is true. Obviously by this context, Peter is writing on the Lord's promise of the Second Coming.

*...one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.* The primary argument of the unbelievers whom Peter confronts in this chapter is that the long delay means that the "Promise" of a Second Coming is false. Actually, the scoffers raised two arguments to oppose the doctrine of the Second Coming. First they raised the question of time. Even in the first century the scoffer could point back to a long history of the world, *"...since the fathers fell asleep."* The second objection they raised was that *"...all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."* Peter first refuted the scoffers' claim that everything continues as it was in the beginning. Next he will refute the time objection in our study passage.

*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.* If God measures time as we measure it, the scoffers have grounds, albeit a very small basis, to raise their objection. However, if God transcends time and is not subject to time as is His creation, including humanity, the objection is groundless. Scripture often uses the number one thousand as a symbol of a large or immeasurable number. God owns the cattle upon a thousand hills. (Psalm 50:10; does God own only the cattle on a specific literal thousand hills?) Most modern teaching on the

doctrine of the Second Coming and related final things builds on a highly questionable interpretation of the thousand years in Revelation 20 as a literal thousand year period. Given that this chapter and its reference to a thousand years appears in one of the most symbolic books in the Bible, the idea of making the thousand years literal is suspect at best.

If we use our study passage to build a mathematical corollary, we arrive at one to three hundred sixty five thousand. Is Peter suggesting that God is subject to time, but at this incredible ratio compared to our experience of time? No. His point is that God is not at all subject to time. Whether we think in terms of one day (Or a nanosecond for that matter) or a thousand years, God remains above and unaffected by time. I've read stories about various famous artists (Painters) always including a depiction of themselves somewhere in their paintings. God is not so vain. While He has left abundant evidences of His creation throughout His material world, God Himself transcends time. He has not subjected Himself to it. Genesis 1:1 affirms that God created time, space, and matter. "In the beginning..." "beginning" relates to time. "...God created the heaven." "heaven" may refer to space as well as to that place where we shall spend eternity in the Lord's glorious presence. "...the earth" defines matter. Thus, quite literally, time, space, and matter were created by God and apart from Him. He existed eternally. He has no beginning, and He is not confined to one location in space, nor does He possess a literal physical body.

*For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. (Colossians 2:9)*

Paul's simple statement in this verse makes the obvious point. Neither God the Father nor the Holy Spirit possesses a physical body. The only physical "body" related to God is the physical body that Jesus inhabited during the Incarnation, a body now glorified and ascended into heaven. The Father has no body; the Holy Spirit has no body; the only body associated with God is Jesus' resurrected, glorified, and ascended body.

*The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward.* Notice the singular form of the word, "promise," not "promises." True enough, God is always faithful to all of His promises. However, in this passage Peter is teaching us regarding one specific promise, the promise of the Second Coming, a promise that the scoffers had rejected and ridiculed. Peter's point is powerful and comforting to the child of grace. It matters not how long the time from Jesus' first coming in the flesh. The Second Coming shall occur on God's timeline, not ours, and certainly not the scoffers'.

Peter's language is far from a generic point regarding the timing of the Lord's return. "...*but is longsuffering to us-ward.*" The Lord has good reason for delaying His return, a very personal reason that relates tenderly to His children, His "family." This is not a context that deals with evangelism or with the new birth. It deals specifically with the Second Coming, so we should interpret this verse in relation to that teaching. The long delay raised by the scoffers, likely believed by some and thereby greatly discouraged, does not relate to an arbitrary decree of God. Although His time is obviously known and relates to His wise and gracious purpose, that wise purpose includes the Lord's knowledge of His family, "...to us-ward."

At least two points stand out as related to the Lord's "us-ward longsuffering." First, given the obvious truth that God is not part of His creation, but transcends it, He knows all them that are His, whether they lived and died many ages ago or whether they shall be born many ages yet to come. (2 Timothy 2:19) If He "Rushed" the Second Coming to match our desired timeline, the end would come prematurely, and all of those chosen vessels of mercy not yet born would never be born. The point is a bit absurd, given God's omniscience, but Peter's readers, including you and me, are not omniscient, so the point is aimed at and for us. Secondly, while Scripture deals abundantly with the sad effects of sin in this world, it also teaches just as clearly that the children of God live their lives in the here and now under the Biblical commandment to live life, all of it, to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; just one of many similar passages throughout the Bible. Do not gloss over the emphatic point of the verse. We are

commanded to glorify God in both our body and in our spirit. Both belong to God.) It is quite easy—and a bit too convenient sometimes—to live life with too much focus on this "Low ground of sin and sorrow." We can become so obsessed with all that is wrong in this world that we blind ourselves to the many wonders in God's creation, both His natural creation and His spiritual family creation. If we allow ourselves to wrest the Scriptures and our own outlook so that we never see the present goodness of God in both areas of God's unique creation, we directly impair our own joy in the Lord and therefore our ability to glorify Him **in both body and spirit**. If we are so focused on heaven that we abuse or deal roughly with our brothers and sisters in Christ, we have no Biblical approval of our bad—our sinful—conduct. (1 John 4:20) Over some sixty years I have observed many godly saints take their final walk through the "...valley of the shadow of death." Almost without exception, the more they came to understand that their time was ending the more they embraced a mellow and tender disposition toward their brothers and sisters. When we mistreat or abuse our brothers and sisters in Christ, we can claim no Bible support, and we have no blessing in the action. In fact, John, both in the above cited verse and its context, writes emphatically to that point.

Consider as just one example Paul's confession to the Philippians. (Philippians 1:12-30) Paul honestly tells the Philippians that he struggles with two options for his future. He thinks of the time when he shall die and enjoy long awaited glory with the Lord. No, he has no thought of causing his death, a sin that he did not consider at all. But he thought of the time with joyful anticipation. Given that Paul was held under house arrest, referenced in this context, the Romans could take him to his execution at any moment, so he was not thinking of some remote event at some distant future date. He also pondered remaining and serving the Philippians in the gospel to their—and his—great joy. Which to choose? He didn't know, but he chose to remain as long as he could and to use his time on earth for the service and joy of the Lord's people. Paul in no way refers to his remaining time in this world in a gloomy or negative way, this "Low ground of sin and sorrow." Not only so, but Paul was aware that his house arrest exposed him to many Roman soldiers who learned the gospel through their time with him, so that he and, far more importantly, his God and Savior, were a topic of discussion "...in the palace." (Philippians 1:13) Further, his faithfulness under pressure also was a powerful encouragement to other believers, all of which he rejoiced to know. Paul didn't sit around with an angry chip on his shoulders, grudging his time here and thinking only of glory to come. He wisely used his time and energy here to love and serve his brothers and sisters in the faith, thereby using his time here to do by example what he taught the Corinthians to do, "...glorify God in your

*body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*" (1 Corinthians 6:20)

*...not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.* If we consider the basic meaning of repentance as a change of direction and apply the idea to Peter's context of the Second Coming, the idea matches the context nicely. The Second Coming, the time that Peter emphasizes throughout this chapter, is too late for people to hear the gospel and repent under its influence, and the idea of "Second chance salvation" after death is never supported or taught in Scripture. In this context, "repentance" refers to something quite different from our usual thought of the word related to hearing, believing the gospel, and changing our lives because of its teaching. Whatever the setting or conduct of life for the child of grace now, the day of the Lord's return and our resurrection shall unquestionably involve an unimaginable change in our conduct. How many children of God who live with the abiding indwelling Holy Spirit and His related conviction of their sins continue to rationalize at least some of their sins, most surely their "besetting sin." When the Lord returns and raises the dead to glorify His children's resurrected bodies, not a one of them shall rationalize any sin that they committed in life. They shall wholly rise to praise God for their redemption from their sins. What a change! In addition to identifying a change that alters behavior, this point implies a change of location, perfectly in harmony with the context that emphasizes the reality of the Second Coming and our literal, bodily resurrection, whenever the Lord is pleased to sound that day and return. While we should keep the Lord's return fresh in our minds during our present pilgrimage, along with the comfort of our own "Exit" time to be with Him, He has charged us to serve Him now by serving His children in gracious, joyful, and edifying submission, both to Him and to them. (Ephesians 5:21) The poet nicely captured this Biblical truth in the hymn, "This is My Father's World." Instead of living a grumpy cross-ways with the world life while here, the Lord commands us to live out this life in joyful meditation on Him and glory to come, as well as dedicating our life to serving His children joyfully, never grudgingly.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church  
16434 Woodruff  
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor