

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Blessed Rest

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day. (2 Thessalonians 1:7–10, KJV 1900)

To be a Christian in the first century all but guaranteed persecution. When Paul refers to those who are troubled in this passage, he identifies those who were being persecuted for their faith, Verse 6. He also identifies when this rest shall occur. "...with us" indicates that Paul and the Thessalonians shall rest together, implying the same for believers who read these words at any time. Thus, the rest is not a temporal event that we experience in this life individually, but one that all the children of grace shall experience in glory together with the Lord. "...when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed" reinforces this point. For Paul and the Thessalonians, this revelation was a future event, as it is for us. Occasionally believers who understand that a significant portion of New Testament prophecy was fulfilled with the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman army in 70 AD will over-extend the prophetic fulfillment of that event and attempt to make it fulfill more prophecy than it can cover. Consider this passage as an example. Paul was killed for his faith prior to 70 AD, so he and the Thessalonians could not rest together because of that event. The Lord indeed appeared in judgment against the Jewish people in that event because of their rejection of His Messiah, but that appearance was one of judgment, not of blessing. In our study passage, Paul describes both a judgment and a blessing, not fulfilled in 70 AD. Wise believers in Jesus who understood His prophecy regarding Jerusalem in 70 AD, believed Jesus' warning and fled into the mountains when they saw the Roman army approaching Jerusalem rather than fleeing into the city for protection. They escaped the ravages of the siege, but they did not rest. Jesus' prophecy (Matthew 24) goes into significant details about all that they should do and not do to avoid that judgment.

1. Do not leave your field and take time to pack up your belongings to take with you. There will be no time for that.
2. If you are on your rooftop repairing a leak, do not go down into the house to pack up before leaving. No time for that.

3. Woe to you if you are pregnant or nursing an infant. You can't travel rapidly, so you will be in danger of the Romans overtaking and capturing you. Modern Christians who ignore the 70 AD factor in Jesus' prophecy struggle with this point. Do they believe that all pregnant women and nursing mothers will go to hell when Jesus returns? Of if they try to make this prophecy refer to the rapture, do they believe that pregnant women and nursing mothers are to be automatically excluded, regardless of how faithful they are? The idea borders on the nonsensical. But if Jesus intended his prophecy as a warning to His people in that age of the coming Roman siege, the prophecy is sensible and logical.

Another occasional error posits that Paul and the apostles mistakenly believed that the Second Coming would occur during their lifetime. They claim this idea to explain Paul's present tense verbs in passages such as this one. In 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul refute this idea. Paul did not expect the Second Coming and resurrection until after the falling away and the revelation of the evil one.

The judgment of which Paul writes is two-fold. 1) It shall indeed be a fiery judgment against the wicked. 2) It shall be a time of glorious rest for the child of grace.

"...with his mighty angels." If read carelessly, a few passages might be—and are by some folks—interpreted to say that angels come to raise the dead at the Second Coming. When I was young, I recall a particular church where a favorite hymn was "Will He send His angels for me?" Scripture's revelation is always better than our imagination. The shocking answer to that question is "No." He shall not send His angels to raise you from the dead. He shall come personally to raise you! Praise God for that "No" answer. Angels shall accompany Him on that glorious return in final victory, but He shall perform the work of resurrection and gathering Himself.

In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our

Lord Jesus Christ. Sometimes folks who hold that the gospel serves as an instrument or as a cause in the new birth will use this verse as supposed proof of their idea. It fails to do so. Paul is not here describing how unregenerate sinners become children of God; he is rather describing those who shall face the righteous judgment of God against their sins. 1) They do not know God. 2) They do not obey the gospel. Both points are true, and both points accurately describe Scripture's teaching regarding the wicked character of those who shall face God in judgment at the last Day.

Still others try to use the verse to prove their belief that all regenerate elect shall be evangelized by the gospel; that is, they shall all hear and obey the gospel. The passage also does not prove that point. That all of the wicked who shall face God in the final judgment meet the two stated qualifications says nothing about the children of God. Later in this lesson Paul will directly make the point that all the elect shall not believe the gospel in this life, but they shall do so *"...in that day."* In my spiritual youth, a very wise man taught me a bedrock principle of sound Biblical interpretation. If a passage either says too much or too little for your interpretation, you have the wrong interpretation. Follow the text; do not twist it or try to lead it where you want it to go. The context of our study passage deals with the Lord's return to judge and sentence the wicked for their sins and to give His people longed-for rest in glory with Him. Other applications of the lesson violate the context and wrest the passage instead of respect it.

Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. This passage, one of many, rejects the idea that the wicked shall be separated from the Lord in that final judgment and be shortly thereafter annihilated. The Scriptures teach an endless conscious awareness after death. Whether a parable or not, the lesson of Lazarus and the rich man accurately describes Lazarus (A righteous man who leaves the sufferings of this life to glorious fellowship with God, the analogy of "Abraham's bosom" in the passage) and the rich man (A wicked man who goes immediately at death to a place of conscious torment, not a place of sleep or non-existence). Both Lazarus and the rich man immediately experience conscious existence after their death. If the idea of soul-sleep were a Biblical truth, this lesson would create a contradiction. Every parable that Jesus constructed in His teaching was drawn from factual reality in life, never from mythology or imagination. Even if one were to view this lesson as a parable (I do not. I view it as a literal narration of what happens after death for both the righteous and the wicked), its content forces the reality of conscious existence after the death of the body for both classes of people.

We can only know limited details regarding either heaven or hell. Our finite minds could not process the full details of either. Scripture's

description of hell, the place of punishment for the wicked, often is associated with unquenchable fire. Our present mindset cannot imagine anything more frightening or painful. In this passage, Paul mentions fire, but he adds some interesting information. *"...from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."* The presence and power of God impose order and structure. In pondering these words and that place of final punishment for the wicked, I can't imagine anything more frightening than a place where God has wholly withdrawn His presence and His power. The whole place falls into destructive chaos. Somehow literal fire almost sounds more appealing.

When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day. While the Lord's return sounds ominous judgment and righteous punishment for the wicked, do not overlook the vivid contrast. It shall simultaneously be a time of glorious joy for all the redeemed.

Notice Paul's parenthetical clarification. He imposes a contrast. All the redeemed shall believe *in that day*. In prophetic weight, the fact that the Thessalonians believed Paul's words serves to reinforce that truth. The point also underscores a less popular, but Biblical point. All the redeemed do not believe now. A thorough study of the four gospels will remind us that the eleven often struggled with believing Jesus and with believing who He was/is. When Jesus spoke the words, *"Ye believe in God, believe also in me,"* (John 14:2) His *"Believe also..."* is framed as a commandment, teaching them to start doing something that they were not doing at the moment. We need not appeal only to "Doubting Thomas" for evidence of this point. I strongly emphasize that every regenerate person has a definite awareness of God in a spiritual context, and therefore does believe in Him at some level, but Scripture does not support the occasional idea that every regenerate elect person shall believe the gospel. That all the redeemed shall believe *"...in that day"* strongly implies that they do not all believe now. In contrast, Paul believed, and the Thessalonians believed, though they faced others who did not. *"In that day,"* all of the elect shall believe. Three major factors contribute to all of the elect not believing in this life. 1) They do not all hear the gospel. 2) On occasion when they do hear the gospel, the message is so mixed with the preacher's flaws as to compromise its power. 3) In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus identifies a number of personal and selfish reasons that interfere with a regenerate person's fruitful hearing and belief of the gospel. The people whom Jesus describes in the parable are not unregenerate; He states that they hear the word, but their own self-centeredness is like weeds in a field. It chokes out the wheat, the good and fruitful influence of the gospel. Friend, how is your personal field? If others were to look deeply into your life and your heart, would they see an

abundant "Crop" of gospel fruit growing and healthy, or would they see more weeds than the good plants?

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

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