

Gospel Gleanings, “...especially the parchments”

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Second Coming: Not a New Idea

And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him. (Jude 14–15, KJV 1900)

When people refer to very ancient events, they often associate those events with “Recorded history.” In the case of our study passage, Bible believers may rightly relate the event of which Jude writes to “Bible history.” I rarely encounter professing believers who deny the Biblical foundation for the Second Coming and God’s final and ultimate victory over all His adversaries. In one way or another, they must first of all deal with the many Biblical passages that teach this truth so clearly. On one occasion, such a person told me that John 5:28–29 and First Corinthians 15 were the two most difficult passages for his non-resurrection view. I tried politely to suggest that perhaps his wisest course might be to change his mind and put his thinking in harmony with those and so many other passages. The saddest point for such people is that they isolate themselves from the Bible’s most comforting truths that they shall surely need when trials and afflictions invade their life, as they surely shall.

It is always convenient for advocates of unbiblical ideas to dismiss those Biblical truths by claiming that the accepted and established truth is a new interpretation or a unique belief that only “You people” believe. Effectively, this personalization constitutes an ad hominem logical fallacy. When you can’t answer the argument or the Biblical basis of an idea, attack or belittle the person who believes it. One grows to expect such dishonorable strategies from politicians, but professing believers in Jesus abandon their claim of faith by this personal attack.

When someone suggests that belief in the Second Coming and the Lord’s final righteous judgment against the wicked along with His raising His beloved children to eternal fellowship and glory with Him is a “New idea,” Bible believers should simply refer the person to this passage. In the dawn of “Bible history,” a bare seven generations from Adam, Jude cites Enoch as the originator of these words. This hardly sounds new, does it?

...the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints. The first and most relevant basis for a right interpretation of Scripture requires a thorough examination of the context in which the lesson appears. In this case, the brief Book of Jude is the immediate context. Jude deals primarily with major

issues of the Lord’s final and righteous judgment and believers’ duty to faithfully contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. In the opening verses (Jude 1:3), “*once*” is translated from a word that means once for all time, not repeatedly delivered to each new generation or to each individual believer. This once for all time giving of the faith to the saints relates to Paul’s emphasis that the Lord’s church is His “*...pillar and ground of the truth.*” (1 Timothy 3:15) No individual believer’s private interpretations should ever be accepted, even by that believer—especially by that believer—as the benchmark truth of Scripture. If individual believers’ private and often very odd interpretations are Scripture’s rule of faith, perhaps we should consider Joseph Smith or Brigham Young or Judge Russell and their revolutionary ideas, an absurd thought when compared to Scripture’s teachings.

Novice believers often think that they have discovered depths and nuances of truth that no other living believer was bright enough or studious enough or spiritual enough to know. Paul warns Timothy that the novice is driven to self-destruction by pride. (1 Timothy 3:6) I recently had occasion to “Revisit” a well-known verse from Proverbs that offers powerful commentary to this truth.

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. (Proverbs 3:5)

Often the simple fact that Scripture puts two scenarios in opposition or contrast teaches a powerful lesson that the casual Bible reader overlooks. What are the two lifestyle options that Solomon contrasts in this verse? The proverbial “Bottom line” should be obvious. If you do one of these things, you will not do—cannot do—the other. You can follow the novice and lean on your own understanding, or you can trust the Lord and His truth first delivered to His saints in the first century and preserved by His churches across subsequent centuries. You can’t do both.

Jude’s reference to Enoch emphasizes that the Lord’s coming of which he writes in prophecy shall not be an isolated coming. He shall not come alone, as He often visited His people during the Old Testament in judgment. He shall come with a large

number of “his saints.” As our first step in arriving at a sound and right understanding of a passage requires thorough study of the immediate context, our contextual interpretation must also harmonize with Scripture’s teachings on the same topic in other locations of the Bible. In this case, Jude’s reference to Enoch’s prophecy is comfortably and fully affirmed by Paul.

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. (1 Thessalonians 4:14-15)

How many people shall accompany the Lord when He returns? Jude addresses the consistent theme of Scripture when it makes any reference to the number of the finally saved as being a relatively large number, not a few. Jude provides two descriptive points for our study. 1) The number of those who accompany the Lord at this “Coming” is an indeterminate and large number, “...ten thousands of his saints.” We know from these words that the number is large, but it is not specific. 2) The identity of those who accompany the Lord at this “Coming” is simple, “his saints.”

In the First Thessalonians passage, Paul adds more details. These “saints” who shall come with the Lord are those who “sleep in Jesus.” Contextually, they sleep in death. That is, their bodies are asleep, but their souls are quite alive and aware of the glorious event that they shall then experience. The Lord shall bring all such people with Him when He returns. The more God invests precious inspired ink in repeating and describing a truth in Scripture, in this case an event, the more He thereby shows us His emphasis. In His purpose, this is something important for us to understand correctly and to believe.

When I first contemplated this project, my mind immediately went to some of the earliest passages in the Bible that I believe teach the life-transforming truth of the Lord’s final coming and setting right of things for and to His glory. Jude affirms the ancient reality of this truth. From the beginning, God revealed the comforting, transforming truths of His final coming to His saints. Jude’s reference to Enoch powerfully affirms this truth.

Where does Jude find this information? Some commentaries will reference one of the Jewish intertestamental apocryphal writings as the source of several quotes in Jude. Perhaps; perhaps not. While the Jews of the first century respected these intertestamental writings, they did not view them as equivalent to their “Holy writings.” Paul refers to these respected “Holy writings” as “the oracles of God.” (Romans 3:1-2) The Church of Rome and a few other Christian denominations accept these writings as if they were fully inspired and as much

valid Scripture as Isaiah’s or Paul’s writings that we read in the Bible. A frequent basis for accepting these writings that these people cite is the fact that Jude quoted from them. If we accept for the sake of discussion that Jude did quote from these writings, this in no way elevates all of these writings to the level of inspired Scripture. Does the fact that Paul cited brief quotes from two ancient pagan Greek poet-philosophers in Acts 17 also elevate pagan Greek writings to the dignity of inspired Scripture? Jude’s reference, if he in fact did quote from the Apocrypha, only validates the citations quoted, not the whole collection of those writings. The same applies to Paul’s quoting from two Greek poet-philosophers. In fact, Paul imposed a distinctly “Christian” interpretation onto those documents. His quote from the poet’s “Ode to Zeus” Paul wholly reinterpreted as referring to God, not to Zeus. When frail humans think themselves wiser than Scripture, they reveal their own wresting of the Scriptures. (2 Peter 3:16) God does not honor their futile efforts to reinvent His inspired and supernaturally preserved “words.” (Psalm 12:6-7) And God does not revise His “words” to accommodate the wresting (Twisting out of joint, out of right interpretation) of men who lean to their own understanding instead of trusting the Lord and His timeless delivery of the truth “once delivered” to His saints.

Commentaries that associate Jude’s words with the apocryphal Book of Enoch follow that book more loyally than they follow Jude’s inspired words. In Enoch, the Lord is prophesied as coming with His “Holy ones,” usually interpreted by the commentaries as angels. There is a vast difference between an angel and a saint. Angels may be involved in some way with the events of the Second Coming, but Jude deals with “saints,” not angels. Throughout the New Testament we have multiple examples of the word “saint” as referring to children of grace, not to angels. Further, as noted above in the First Thessalonians passage, acceptance of the word “saint” in its usual reference to redeemed children of grace manifests Jude’s harmony with Paul on this bedrock truth of Scripture. God’s redeemed children shall be personally and intimately involved with their Lord and Savior at the Second Coming, but their involvement shall be as beneficiaries and as witnesses of their Lord’s righteous judgment against the wicked.

Jude follows the consistent pattern that we have seen in this study. The Second Coming for the child of grace is an event of comfort and joy, not of fear and dread. “*Wherefore comfort one another with these words.*”

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor