

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

Volume 28, Number 15

April 15, 2012



## God's Message to Seven Churches: Philadelphia: Kingdom Keeping

*Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. (Revelation 3:9-10, KJV 1900)*

We should note that this church hears no rebukes from the Lord, a rare church indeed. She has stood faithfully in the heat of trials, and she has resisted the internal corruptions that we have seen eating away at the godly fabric of most of the other churches named in this context. She needs the Lord's encouraging words to stay the course.

*Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.* I view this verse as referring to the Jewish synagogue at Philadelphia, not necessarily to all Jews or to all synagogues. Throughout the Book of Acts, when the apostles and other preachers first arrived at a city, their first stop was the local synagogue, and many of their first converts in the city were Jews who heard these men preach the gospel at their synagogue. However, in Philadelphia, the synagogue was not so receptive to the gospel. In fact, they were obviously and openly hostile to it.

Beginning with the return of Jews to a small portion of their ancient homeland in 1947, many Christians have built more of their beliefs regarding the future of the Jews on contemporary history than on the Bible. Jesus specifically defined the conditions of restored blessings to the Jews in the Olivet Discourse, and I find no Scripture that contradicts His requirement.

*For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. (Matthew 23:39 KJV)*

The One who came "...in the name of the Lord" was the Lord Jesus Christ whom first century Jews rejected. I find no indication that the Jews who returned to modern Israel in 1947 embraced Jesus as their Messiah. In fact, many Christians who have visited that land will testify to the opposite.

Any effort to find Biblical support for an end-times Jewish restoration to the Lord's blessings in the gospel encounters major problems with Scripture. Who is a Jew today? How do you validate a person's claim to being a Jew? Scripture

requires far more than a surname for such a claim. The populist ideas that suggest that modern Jews are secretly working to rebuild their ancient temple or that such a new temple shall be part of the proposed end-times Jewish restoration fly in the face of New Testament teachings. Any pretense of temple worship after Calvary rejects the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, God's one and only High Priest, as well as His offering of His own body as the sacrifice for sins. I have baptized more than one person with a Jewish surname, and their attitude has consistently been the same as any other believer. Jew or Gentile matters not. In the Gospel Age, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ defines God's blessings, not one's race or culture.

Who then is a Jew in terms of being God's chosen people and the recipients of His covenant blessings? Scripture answers the question.

*For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God. (Romans 2:28-29 KJV)*

God looks beyond race or culture in our age to define a Jew. So should we. The Lord promised deliverance to the faithful church in Philadelphia, and He likewise promised severe judgment against the synagogue of that city.

*Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.* Most contemporary Christian commentaries ignore context and apply this verse to their unbiblical dispensational view of end times. Examine this verse and think about the first people who read or heard these words read to them, first century churches made up of individual believers who stood faithfully in their faith-walk. Can we reasonably—or even rationally—imagine that any of them expected to live for thousands of years and still be alive at the Second Coming? I have actually talked with a few folks who hold to this view who claim that such a person exists, one or more believers who have

been supernaturally preserved alive since the first century. Of course, they offer no real proof of the claim, nor can they, because such a person does not exist. "...will keep thee..." is personal to this church in its time, first century, not end times.

Whatever the Holy Spirit intended by these words, the message was to give comfort and encouragement to suffering first century saints in their lifetime. It might have been interesting to them to think about some theory regarding end times unknown centuries after they died, but such a thought would give them no comfort in their trials.

I accept the majority view that Revelation was written in the last decade of the first century. During this era, Domitian became emperor of Rome, and he directed a fierce persecution against the Christians of that day throughout the Empire. If we interpret the verse as applicable to the people to whom it was addressed, the only reasonable interpretation that we can make, we may then conclude that the Lord promised these suffering saints some form of insulation from that persecution. This promise would mean something to the first century Philadelphia believers, and it would give them great comfort.

In our day, two extreme views of end times, the period immediately preceding the Second Coming, exist. I have briefly noted the dispensational view above. This view is characterized by such unbiblical ideas as a secret rapture of the faithful and an endless and wholly fictional extrapolation of ideas that supposedly shall occur during this time. People who hold this view are among the leading proponents of the utterly false idea that the Jews return to their native land in 1947 in some way fulfilled Biblical prophecy, despite the obvious fact that those who returned in no way embraced Jesus as God Incarnate or as their Messiah.

The other extreme view typically identifies itself as "Preterist." This word is derived from a Latin word that refers to something that is past. The preterist view that I here define as extreme holds that the Second Coming occurred in 70 A. D. with the Romans' destruction of the City of Jerusalem. Most people in this school of thought allege that Paul and the other apostles falsely believed that the Second Coming and resurrection (which many extreme preterists either doubt or wholly deny) would occur in their lifetime. Any serious reading of Paul's two letters to the Thessalonians will see that Paul confronted and refuted the notion of an immediate Second Coming; he never accepted it. It was this precise idea that Paul addressed and refuted in these two letters.

The extreme preterist belief that Paul and the other apostles held to this false belief is typically based on the appearance of "We" in some of the Second Coming passages. For example:

*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 4:15 KJV)*

*Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:17 KJV)*

What is the answer to Paul's use of "we" in these two verses? First, a careful reading of Second Thessalonians will remove any thought that Paul expected personally to be alive at the Second Coming. A more reasonable explanation is obvious. Whenever the Second Coming occurs, the New Testament assures us that a godly, faithful remnant of believers shall be alive, serving God in spirit and in truth, and looking for His coming. Those who shall live at that time will have their Bibles and be reading the words that the Holy Spirit directed Paul and the other inspired writers to write. They will truly speak the words with the personal pronoun. From Paul's writing of these words till our day, faithful believers and preachers have read these words with the joyful assurance that the Second Coming is a real event, not a myth, and that "We" would rejoice to see Him in our day.

Some dispensationalist commentaries make a point regarding "...keep thee from...." They build their case around the grammatical point in the Greek New Testament that these words indicate that the faithful in Philadelphia will never experience the coming trial. The technical point of fully avoiding the trial or of going through it with the Lord's protective care is not especially significant in the overall point of the lesson. For a believer in the midst of trial, the major need is to know that the Lord knows and will stand by us. At times He may wholly prevent the trial from coming our way. At other times the trial may come, but He promises to stand by us and to guide us safely through it to deliverance on the other side. As you and I face our own trials in life, we might understandably prefer to avoid the trials altogether. However, we should face every potential difficulty with the dual conviction. 1) The Lord will intervene and prevent the problem altogether. 2) The Lord will stand by us and enable us to overcome the trial that comes upon us. Does it really matter? We have the Lord's promise and presence in either case.

Despite the dangers from both a hostile synagogue in their city and a powerful civil authority that posed a constant threat to them, the Lord promises the faithful in Philadelphia that He stands faithfully and powerfully by them. He is stronger than either of these adversaries, or for that matter, both of them combined. They need not fear. Their God knows their need and stands with them. He promises no less to you and to me, if we, like the saints of Philadelphia, stand steadfastly in the faith of Scripture. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee...." (Revelation 2:10)

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Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor