

Triennial Torah Study – 3rd Year 28/04/2012

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Leviticus 26

Blessings and Curses (Leviticus 26)

God had made promises of national greatness to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph that were unconditional-He committed Himself to bestow them on their descendants to remain true to His Word. However, God had not as yet bound Himself to any time frame in this regard except that the national greatness had to occur in this age in order for the Israelites to possess the "gate of their enemies" (see Genesis 22:17). Since Israel was not even a nation until the time of Moses in the mid-15th century B.C., this allowed a nearly 3,500-year window until this end time for the birthright blessings of national greatness to be poured out. So would God bestow the blessings at the beginning of that window-that is, to the newly formed nation of Israel here heading toward the Promised Land? It appears that He would have-if Israel had met the condition of continued obedience as outlined in this chapter, Leviticus 26, and its parallel passage, Deuteronomy 28. (Again, the blessings themselves were unconditional, but God was free to attach conditions as to the time in which He would give them.)

Right up front in Leviticus 26, God stresses prohibitions against idolatry and Sabbath breaking, the very sins for which Israel would be punished by national captivity under the Assyrians more than 700 years later (compare Ezekiel 20:18-24). Then the Eternal lays forth the conditions that had to be met in order for them to begin receiving the birthright blessings right away: "If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them, then I will give you..." (verse 3). Perfect weather and soil conditions would yield one bumper crop after another. They would have so much that they would have to get rid of their vast surplus to make room for the next incredible harvest (verses 4-5). Their country would not be overrun by deadly snakes, swarms of locusts or disease-bearing tse-tse flies, which plague the African continent. Savage lions and tigers would not ravage small villages, terrifying and devouring their inhabitants, as happens in some areas of Africa and India today. And the Israelites would dwell in continuous peace at home, with no fear of invasion by enemy armies (verse 6).

Blessed in natural resources and with power to repel all military aggression (verses 7-8), they would soon constitute the most powerful and prestigious nation in the world. This was the birthright that Israel had been promised!

Disobedience, however, would bring a different result-for a time, at least. The Israelites would be victims of sickness and disease, drought, crop failures, famine and pestilence. They would be invaded, defeated, plundered and, as they had been in Egypt, enslaved. Sadly, these exact kinds of curses came on them time after time during the period of the judges. Yet they failed to learn their lesson. The period of the divided monarchy saw Israel

wallowing ever more in the worship of Baal and other false gods. And finally, the rest of the curses of Leviticus 26 befell them, including national captivity and a 2,520-year delay in receiving the birthright blessings (see “Birthright Blessings Delayed for 2,520 Years” at www.ucg.org/brp/materials/).

At last, God did bestow the birthright of national greatness on the modern descendants of Israel as He had promised-and the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, other British-descended areas and, to a lesser extent, the other northwest European nations have been tremendously blessed as a result (for details, request or download the free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*). But the timing is still in His hands. He is not required to continue the blessings indefinitely in this age. Indeed, many prophecies make it clear that the curses of Leviticus 26 are again going to befall the modern-day descendants of Israel-in a worse way than ever before. “Indeed all the nations will wonder, ‘Why has the Lord done thus to this land? What caused this great display of anger?’ They will conclude, ‘It is because they abandoned the covenant of the Lord, the God of their ancestors’” (Deuteronomy 29:24-25, New Revised Standard Version).

Some conclude that because God divorced ancient Israel and because the Sinai marriage covenant ended with the death of Christ, God no longer deals with His physical people based on the principles of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. Yet, while the Husband/wife relationship based on the Sinai covenant has ended between God and physical Israel, the God/people relationship, based on much earlier promises to Abraham as well as other covenants God made with Israel besides the Old Covenant marriage, has certainly not ended.

Indeed, when Leviticus 26 was given, the Old Covenant marriage was already in existence making the blessings and curses distinct from it. This becomes even clearer when we consider that immediately following virtually the same terms in Deuteronomy 28, we are told, “These are the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which He made with them in Horeb” (29:1).

The principles delineated in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, then, are still in force.

We should also consider that many of God’s laws are self-enforcing, meaning that breaking them brings about punishing consequences: “Your own wickedness will correct you, and your backslidings will reprove you” (Jeremiah 2:19). For example, earlier in Leviticus we read of God’s instructions about which animal flesh is suitable for human consumption. Eating those animals God designates as “unclean” and unfit for eating can bring about any number of diseases and other health problems on those who disregard His instructions (you can read what several medical doctors and nutritionists say in our free booklet *What Does the Bible Teach About Clean and Unclean Meats?*).

Similarly, flaunting God’s laws regarding marriage and sexual relationships can lead to crippling and deadly epidemics such as AIDS and other sexually transmissible diseases along with other consequences like fatherless homes and resulting increases in poverty, crime, child abuse and substance abuse. Furthermore, we can’t ignore the fact that a drop in moral standards weakens the very fabric of any society and, if not reversed, makes a people or nation a tempting target for military attack and conquest-as has happened repeatedly throughout history. Whenever we’re tempted to think God’s laws don’t apply to us or are no longer in force, we should consider their benefit and the possible unforeseen consequences of violating them. This is certainly part of the warning inherent in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

Ezekiel 33

A Watchman for the House of Israel (Ezekiel 33:1-20)

“So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me” (Ezekiel 33:7). Some messages in Ezekiel are repeated for emphasis. God had previously assigned Ezekiel to be a watchman—a lookout, sentry or sentinel—for the house of Israel (3:17). Interestingly, that initial assignment came before Ezekiel’s first warning message and this one now comes after his final one in time order. What follows chronologically in the book of Ezekiel is a glorious picture of the Promised Land under the reign of Jesus Christ (chapters 40-48). In the first case, God privately commissioned Ezekiel as a watchman. Here the prophet is to explain his role to the people and their responsibility once they have been warned. This is interesting considering that no more warnings were given in the book after this point in time. The point seems to be: “Okay, you’ve been warned—now it’s up to you to follow through.” When he arranged his book, Ezekiel placed this passage before the announcement of Jerusalem’s fall (33:21-22) and his final warnings to Israel and its leaders (33:23-34:10).

Part of God’s standard of fairness is that people should be warned even when those doing the warning don’t expect them to necessarily respond and repent. Part of the reason for the warning may be found in 33:33—“And when this comes to pass—surely it will come—then they will know that a prophet has been among them.” They won’t be able to say no one warned them. Though they may have suffered terribly for not responding to the warnings, at least they can still repent after the punishments and ultimately receive God’s forgiveness and salvation.

God first explains the basis of the analogy—a watchman watching for an approaching hostile army, “the sword” (verses 2-6). Then in verses 7-9 God applies the imagery to how His watchmen are to relay God’s messages that warn people to repent of their sins or else face dire consequences. If God’s watchmen—His prophets or His Church—fail to deliver His warning messages of what will befall the nations if they fail to repent, then the watchmen are held largely accountable for the sin and suffering of the people. “His blood I will require at your hand” (verse 8).

The Scriptures make clear that the Church must, until Christ returns, continue to preach the gospel—the good news of the coming Kingdom of God—accompanied by a watchman-type warning message and call to repentance. Plus, the Church must act like a mother to carefully and thoroughly nurture and nourish its members so they can achieve maximum spiritual growth and effectiveness in helping to carry out God’s work on earth. Indeed, the elders of God’s Church are to “watch” over the spiritual welfare of its members—warning them of outside threats and of sins within (see Acts 20:31; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1-4), rebuking and correcting as necessary (see 2 Timothy 4:1-5).

Like Ezekiel, the Church of God even has a special responsibility to preach to Israel until Christ returns. As Jesus told His disciples, “You will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes” (Matthew 10:23). Yet the vast majority of the people of the modern nations of Israel do not even know that they are Israelites. Therefore, they don’t realize that the prophecies of what is going to befall end-time Israel—such as those in the book of Ezekiel—apply to them. It thus becomes the Church’s responsibility, as God enables and empowers it, to inform the Israelites of their identity and point out these prophecies. We have produced a full-color booklet with that very goal in mind—titled *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.

Of course, all nations should be warned of what’s coming on the world. Consider that the prophecy Ezekiel relayed immediately before this chapter concerned the judgment coming on Egypt. Still, since the greatest time of trouble ever, which is yet to come, is referred to as the time of Jacob’s trouble (Jeremiah 30:7), it should be clear that the nations of Jacob— particularly the chief nations of Jacob—are the lands in greatest need of warning. We should also understand this in terms of the fact that the Israelite nations, having a firmer biblical background than the rest of the world, stand more culpable for disobedience than other nations. And, of course, there is the general principle of “the bigger they are, the harder they fall.” Those headed for the greater fall are in need of the louder warning.

Indeed, even apart from all that, the vast majority of prophetic warnings in Scripture are given to Israel. So in teaching all Scripture and giving weight to those things the Bible does, proclaiming warnings to Israel is a necessary part of the work of God's Church.

In Ezekiel 33:11, God makes it clear that He has no pleasure in death and punishment. His desire is to see people turn—meaning repent—from their evil ways. It's as if God is saying: "Don't you want to live?! Then do the right thing!"

God then addresses what's fair and what's not—a subject also touched on in a previous chapter (Ezekiel 18). God is not trying to make everything "fair" for human beings in every aspect of this mortal life. Life is often very unfair—we don't choose where we're born, our early influences, what we're taught. And much of what we experience in life is the result of choices made by others. But God is promising to be fair about how our ultimate and eternal fate is determined. Each man's fate largely depends on how he concludes his life, either faithful to God at the end or unfaithful. If a man lives righteously most of his life and rejects God at the end, all his righteous acts go down the drain—they won't save him from losing eternal life. But it is never too late to repent if one is capable of repenting. In other words, a man who has lived an evil life can still sincerely repent toward the end of his life and meet God's conditions for living forever in His Kingdom. Of course, a person is foolish to procrastinate about turning to God, partly because he never knows when his life will suddenly come to an end. Moreover, if we knowingly resist doing what we know is right, we form bad habits that will be difficult to break and damage and sear our consciences so that it becomes increasingly difficult to repent.

The Israelites complain that "the way of the Lord is not fair" (33:17, 20). Yet "in punishing Israel God was being faithful to the covenant stipulations. This covenant had been approved by the Israelites. They had agreed to its commands and accepted the consequences of breaking them, corporately and individually (see 5:8-17; 12:15, 16; 16:60, 61; 18:19-32; 20:5; Ex. 19:1-9; Deut. 27). God presents His rationale in these verses for deciding who would be rewarded with life and who would suffer death: He would save those who repent and turn to Him, but would condemn those who trust in themselves and do evil. After presenting His rationale, God declares that His judgment is just and fair—certainly more just [by any standard] than the practices of the Israelites" (Nelson Study Bible, note on Ezekiel 33:12-20). Ultimately, God is perfectly just and fair.

The most common human approach to fairness is like a balancing scale. All the bad acts are put on one side of the scale and all the good acts on the other side. People think that if there is more weight on the good side, God will usher them into eternal glory. This is why many people live a hypocritical double life. They want to do evil, but they think that as long as they do more good than evil, they will escape God's punishment. Naturally people imagine that their goodness outweighs their sins, which they view as minor. In fact, they think of themselves as basically good even if most of their actions and attitudes are bad. They play deceptive games with other people, and it seems they think they can also play games with God—that they can pacify God or buy Him off with their offerings, charitable acts and show of religiosity. Man's approach to fairness leads to hypocrisy and complacency, whereas God's approach to fairness teaches true heartfelt repentance and spiritual overcoming. Only the latter approach will bring God's blessings and the opportunity for eternal life.

"They Hear Your Words, but They Do Not Do Them" (Ezekiel 33:21-34:31)

Ezekiel 33:21 is a significant turning point in this book. Remember that in Ezekiel 24:26-27, God had foretold the fall of Jerusalem and said to Ezekiel: "On that day one who escapes will come to you to let you hear it with your ears; on that day [of his arrival] your mouth will be opened to him who has escaped; you shall speak and no longer be mute." God, we recall, had forbidden Ezekiel from any spoken communication with the exiles except for the particular things God commanded him to say. Yet now the messenger has at last arrived—in January 585 B.C., seven

months after Jerusalem's fall—and Ezekiel is finally able to communicate as normal. Also, whereas everything up to this point was mainly a warning message to Israel and Judah and other nations, the remainder of the book focuses mainly on the hope of Israel's future deliverance.

Many biblical scholars maintain that since Ezekiel was among the Jewish exiles in Babylon, the last chapters are about the liberation of the Jews from ancient Babylon, allowing them to return to Palestine after their 70 years of captivity. But Ezekiel's calling was to prophesy concerning the whole house of Israel, not just Judah. And his prophecies of the end time mostly refer to all of Israel—reunited. The restoration Ezekiel describes involves great miracles and is much grander than the return of a fraction of the Jewish exiles to their homeland after the fall of ancient Babylon. Far from being a mere technical difference in how to explain Ezekiel's writings, this fact is crucial to understanding end time prophecy.

As hopeful and positive as this section of the book is, however, it does begin with a few rebukes and pronouncements of divine judgment. God informs Ezekiel that the remaining survivors in the ruins of the land of Israel have reasoned that, since they are still alive and have escaped deportation, they must be the righteous ones—the faithful remnant. Since Abraham was just one faithful man and God decreed the land his, they think that they, being many faithful and his rightful heirs, will surely be given the land back (33:23-24). Yet they fail to properly assess their own mindset and conduct. They rely on themselves rather than God. Even worse, they are idolaters, murderers and adulterers who persist in abominations (verses 25-26)—no way will they inherit the land of Israel! Instead, they will die as so much of the nation already has.

They fell into the typical trap of looking at circumstances for “signs” of divine favor, something people often do today. If one wants to know if his ways please God, he needs to take a more mature approach. That is, he needs to learn God's will through His Word and come to regard that Word as the highest authority in his life. It's not who you are or what you have that “proves” God's blessing. He plainly says, “I will bless those who have humble and contrite hearts, who tremble at my word” (Isaiah 66:2, NLT).

It may well be that the description and warning of Ezekiel 33:23-29 also apply to those who will be left among the national homelands of modern Israel in the end time.

Ezekiel may have been an eloquent speaker because people talked about how much they enjoyed listening to him (verses 30-32). But God said, “They hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain” (verse 31; compare Isaiah 58:2; Psalm 78:36-37; James 1:21-24). Not much has changed in the last 2,500 years with most religious people. The Bible Reader's Companion states: “The exiles of Ezekiel's day were ‘churchgoers.’ They made it a regular practice to come to the prophet, sit down, and listen to his words. But to them the prophet's eloquent speech was only entertainment! They did not come to hear, and then put into practice, the word of their God. What a reminder for us today. Do we go to church to see friends, listen to the choir, and enjoy the preacher's jokes? Or do we go to hear God's Word and take it to heart?” (note on Ezekiel 33:30-32).

God's prophets and preachers are to warn the people about the prophesied consequences of failing to obey Him. When the prophecies come to pass, “then they will know that a prophet has been among them” (verse 33). Woe then to those who haven't been obeying God. Indeed, this is quite interesting since, at this point in Ezekiel's book, the ancient destruction of Judah and Jerusalem had come to pass—the news of Jerusalem's fall just now arriving. And yet the wording of verse 33 seems to indicate that there was more to come to prove Ezekiel a true prophet. This may imply that, at least in part, the end-time fall of all Israel is in view here—and that the people gathering to listen to Ezekiel's words may mean people in the modern nations of Israel assembling in church services shortly

before that time to hear Ezekiel's words preached in sermons. There are many who go to church services today clamoring to hear sermons on prophecy—but who fail to take personally any exhortations to repentance and spiritual growth.

“Woe to the Shepherds of Israel...!” (Ezekiel 33:21-34:31)

Jerusalem had been conquered and burned—the climax of God's punishment on Judah. God now makes it clear that a large measure of the blame for the sinfulness of Judah and Israel and their resulting captivities (both ancient and future) lay at the feet of the rulers, “the shepherds of Israel” (34:2). The metaphor of “shepherds” in this context refers more to kings and civil rulers than priests or prophets, but in God's nation, civil rulers were expected to be spiritual leaders as well—to teach His laws and to set a godly example of submission to His laws (compare Deuteronomy 17:14-20). And, of course, the principles here would apply to religious leaders of the nation as well.

(It should be noted that some have tried to use Ezekiel 34 as a castigation of the ministry of spiritual Israel, the true Church of God, in the end time. However, the “flock” of God in this chapter is, according to verse 30, “the house of Israel,” a phrase repeatedly used in Ezekiel and the rest of Scripture to refer to the physical nation of Israel. Of course, the principles in this chapter could certainly refer to some leaders among the Church in the last days. Jesus Christ warned in Matthew 24:48-51 of some of God's servants then abusing others, and we see that same problem throughout the Church age, as all ministers are human and subject to slipping into the self-centered corruption we read of here. Nevertheless, it is a misapplication of this prophecy to claim that it directly foretells corrupt ministers serving the true Church, men who fail to care for God's spiritual flock.)

One of the best examples for rulers, Christian ministers and leaders of all kinds to emulate is that of a good shepherd—a “servant leader.” God repeatedly describes in the Bible what makes a good shepherd. God should know—Jesus Christ is “the good Shepherd” (John 10:11, 14), “the great Shepherd” (Hebrews 13:20) and the perfect Shepherd (Psalm 23). Jesus taught that a good shepherd is devoted and self-sacrificing, putting the needs of the sheep above his own desires—he “gives his life for the sheep” (John 10:11). By contrast, a “hireling” will readily abandon the sheep because he “does not care about the sheep” (verse 13). Leaders should have the mindset of being assistant shepherds serving under Jesus Christ, submitting to, following and applying His attitude and approach (see 1 Peter 5:1-4).

Jesus told His disciples, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men hold them in subjection, tyrannizing over them” (Matthew 20:25, Amplified Bible). But here in Ezekiel 34 God says the rulers of Israel—“My shepherds” (verse 8)—have been as bad as gentile despots about advancing and enriching themselves at the expense of the people. They acted more like wolves than shepherds, causing suffering rather than relieving suffering. Therefore, God pronounces, “Woe to the shepherds of Israel...!” (verse 2).

Good shepherds are concerned for every individual, diligently seeking to save even one lamb if it goes astray (Matthew 18:10-14). By contrast, God said the supposed shepherds of Israel had not “sought what was lost” (Ezekiel 34:4). God in His mercy would have saved and “brought back what was driven away”—either from Him spiritually or from the land literally—if the leaders and people had repented and begun to truly serve God.

In verses 5 and 8, God says that “there was no shepherd.” Yet in the second reference, note that God says that “there was no shepherd, nor did My shepherds search...” This might sound like a contradiction. Were there shepherds, or weren't there? What is meant is either that there were no shepherds in their scattered condition or, perhaps more likely, there were no true shepherds over the Israelites. There were people in the positions of shepherds (national leaders)—but not ones who thought and acted as shepherds. (This should help us to see that political rulers were more in mind, for in Ezekiel's day was not Jeremiah a true religious leader? And in the last days, will there not be true spiritual leaders, such as the two witnesses of Revelation 11?)

Because there were no right-minded rulers over the people—because there won't be any at the end of this age—God says He will personally step in to lovingly serve as Israel's shepherd (verses 11-16). He will "bring back what was driven away" (verse 16). While this refers in small part to the liberation of the Jews from their ancient Babylonian captivity, it refers more to the end-time restoration of "scattered" Israelites from all over the world, as the latter part of this chapter shows.

Official rulers are not the only ones guilty of evil. God judges each person individually—"I shall judge between sheep and sheep" (verse 17). All too often the stronger oppress the weaker— the "fat" sheep take advantage of the "lean sheep" (verse 20).

How valuable that King David's boyhood experience was as a shepherd! God foretells that He will one day establish David as the shepherd over Israel and "prince" or ruler under Him (verses 23-24). Critics often don't interpret this literally, saying this is simply a prophecy of the Messiah, who was to be of Davidic lineage. But Ezekiel specifically says that the resurrected and glorified David will once again be king over all Israel (37:24; Jeremiah 30:9; Hosea 3:5). To put it simply, Jesus will be King of all nations. David, serving under Him, will be king of Israel. And the 12 apostles, under David, will each serve as leader over one of the tribes of Israel (see Luke 22:29-30).

During the coming reign of Jesus Christ, God's "covenant of peace" will even extend to the animal kingdom (Ezekiel 34:25, 28). This is also a type of transforming all people to act more like lambs than wolves and other wild beasts. God will cause rain to come in due season; and there will be many other physical and spiritual "showers of blessing" (verse 26). Blissful and wonderful conditions will prevail when all the world is cared for by the Good Shepherd. (To learn more, request or download our free booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.)

Ezekiel 35

God's Judgment on Edom (Ezekiel 35)

Chapter 35 may appear a digression from the subject of Israel's restoration, and yet the removal of Israel's great enemy, the most persistent thorn in its side, is indeed central to Israel's restoration. Mount Seir is Edom (verses 2, 15; 25:8; 36:5; Genesis 36:30; 2 Chronicles 20:10). The Edomites are the descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother, so the strife began as sibling rivalry (Genesis 25:30). But Esau's resentment turned into never-ending "ancient hatred" (Ezekiel 35:5) and "anger," "envy" and "hatred" (verse 11).

"Edom had sought to block Israel's first entrance into the Promised Land (Num 20:14-21; 24:15-19)...There were conflicts during the times of Saul (1 Sam 14:47), Solomon (1 Kings 11:14-22), Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 20:1-23), Jehoram (2 Kings 8:21), and Ahaz (2 Chronicles 28:17). The prophets regularly made reference to Edom's antagonism toward Israel and the resulting judgment they would receive (Isa 11:11-16; Dan 11:41; Amos 2:1). Malachi demonstrated that the hatred between these nations was still common in his day (Mal 1:2-5)" (Expositor's Bible Commentary, note on Ezekiel 35:1-9).

The clearest example of hostility today is seen in the branch of Edomites that comprises many of the Palestinians, whose hatred regularly breaks out against the Israeli state. (The persistent failure of the West to understand that deep-seated hatred that transcends hundreds of generations is one of the principal reasons that peace plan after peace plan fails utterly—and will continue to fail.) It also appears that Edom will constitute part of the end-time Babylonian power bloc—the great enemy of Israel in the last days—perhaps through Turkish participation in the coming European empire as well as a large influx into Europe of Muslim immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa (see the Bible Reading Program comments on Obadiah).

Esau lost the birthright and the blessing, and in jealous envy has repeatedly tried to capture territory from the descendants of Israel. “These two nations” in verse 10 refers to Israel and Judah (see 37:15-28). Once ancient Israel and Judah both had gone into captivity, Edomites thought they could move in and take over the land. This will again be Edom’s attitude in the end time—which may well be the primary reference in Ezekiel 35.

Mentioned more than once in Scripture is how the Edomites have attacked, and will attack, Israel at her times of vulnerability—when she is engaged in conflicts with other enemies (35:5; 36:2-5; 25:12; Obadiah 11, 13-14). Unger’s Bible Dictionary says in its entry on “Edomites”: “When Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem the Edomites joined him, and took an active part in the plunder of the city and slaughter of the Jews. Their cruelty at that time seems to be specially referred to in the 137th Psalm. It was on account of these acts of cruelty committed upon the Jews in the day of their calamity that the Edomites were so fearfully denounced by the later prophets (Isa. 34:5-8; 63:1-4; Jer. 49:17; Lam. 4:21; Ezek. 25:13, 14; Amos 1:11, 12; Obad. 8, 10, sq.). On the conquest of Judah, the Edomites, probably in reward for their services during the war, were permitted to settle in southern Palestine, and the whole plateau between it and Egypt; but they were about the same time driven out of Edom proper by the Nabataeans. For more than four centuries they continued to prosper. But during the warlike rule of the Maccabees they were again completely subdued, and even forced to conform to Jewish laws and rites and submit to the government of Jewish prefects. The Edomites were now incorporated with the Jewish nation, and the whole province was often termed by Greek and Roman writers Idumaea. Immediately before the siege of Jerusalem by Titus, twenty thousand Idumaeans were admitted to the Holy City, which they filled with robbery and bloodshed.”

Scriptures indicate the Edomites will once again—in the end time—gleefully join in attacking the Israelites. Edom has chronically been guilty of another sin that God despises—pride and arrogance. And when the Edomites exalt themselves against God’s nations and God Himself, they are getting into deep trouble with their blasphemies (Ezekiel 35:10-13).

The history of the Edomites toward the Israelites has largely been hatred, hardheartedness, cruelty, and arrogance. Consequently, in several scriptures, prophecies of the end time foretell God’s annihilation of all Edomites (see Ezekiel 35:14-15; 25:13; Obadiah 18; Jeremiah 49:17-18). The good news is they will be raised to life in the second resurrection, humbled, and ready to receive God’s instructions—something we will read more about in Ezekiel 37.

Ezekiel 36

A New Heart and a New Spirit (Ezekiel 36)

Ezekiel 36 foretells the end-time repentance, conversion, and transformation of Israel. Of course, the offer from God to “give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you” (verse 26) ultimately applies to all people, since all people will be invited to become a part of Israel in a spiritual sense (Romans 2:28-29; Galatians 3:26-29).

Although God uses nations to punish other nations, the nation’s inflicting the punishment are not truly mindful of this and end up heaping guilt on themselves in each endeavor—their pride becomes worse, they boastfully take credit to themselves, they take gleeful pleasure in causing suffering, they are too harsh, they think they can steal their enemies’ land and get away with it, and they don’t repent of their own sins. Some of those sins are stated in Ezekiel 36:2-5 regarding “the rest of the nations and against all Edom.”

In verses 6-9, God reassures the land of Israel that “I am for you” and that “the nations that are around you shall bear their own shame.” In verse 8, God speaks joyfully to the mountains and land of Israel and says, “they [the returning captives] are about to come!” The return of Babylonian exiles to the Promised Land in the time soon after

Ezekiel was but a small forerunner of the great second Exodus of the end-time. God says, “I will multiply upon you man and beast” (verses 10-11, 38).

The “you” in verses 13-14 is again the Holy Land, which has gotten the reputation of being a cursed land that devours its inhabitants. Yet God is going to vastly change that reputation at the return of Jesus Christ.

The analogy of verse 17 is based on the laws of a woman’s monthly “uncleanness” detailed in Leviticus 15:19-24. During her monthly period, a woman was considered ritually unclean for seven days, meaning primarily that she was not allowed to go to the tabernacle to participate in any sacrifices or other worship. But, also, everyone and everything she touched were then considered unclean for a time. So God is saying that the way of the people of Israel had not only been evil, cutting themselves off from fellowship with Him, but also that the Israelites had been a bad influence on everyone they had “touched”—“wherever they went, they profaned My holy name” (Ezekiel 36:20). The Israelites caused God’s name to be profaned among the nations in two ways: 1) in misrepresenting Him themselves through their evil conduct before other nations—taking His name in vain by claiming to be His people and yet not living according to His will; and 2) provoking other nations to make derogatory remarks about Israel’s God and religion based on Israel’s sinful conduct.

God chose and blessed Israel with the intent that it would model His way of life, thereby making a way for all nations to come to know and worship Him—and to receive His blessings. Instead, the nations of modern Israel wallow in the wealth God gave them, their people living in such gross immorality that other nations are repulsed by the emptiness of their character. Plainly, the name of Israel sets upon the United States, Britain and other nations of northwest European heritage. While these nations provide the economic engine and the military might for the entire world, their spiritual heart is hollow. The rest of the world thinks of them as materialistic, not the spiritual model for their people.

In verses 22 and 32, God gives the justification for the restoration of Israel—in a sense, God’s grace. It will not be because Israel has earned it by a record of righteousness. God will do it, He says, “for My holy name’s sake.”

In verse 25, God says He will “sprinkle clean water” on His people. Numbers 19 describes the process of purifying those who, for whatever reason, are ritualistically “unclean.” Water from a running stream (verse 17) was mixed with ashes from a burned red heifer (verses 2, 9) to make “water of purification” (verse 9) that is “sprinkled on him” who was unclean (verse 20). (Interestingly, the Hebrew term in verse 17 translated “running water” in the New King James Version literally means “living water.”) Hebrews 9:13-14 calls this process the “purifying of the flesh” and goes on to say that real spiritual cleansing is only possible by the blood of Christ. This true purification is referred to in Hebrews 10:22 as having “our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience.” So in Ezekiel 36:25, God is saying He will take Israel through His spiritual cleansing process.

In the Bible, water is used to represent many things, including God’s Spirit (John 7:37-38).

However, before one receives the Holy Spirit (Ezekiel 36:26-27), he must first begin to receive “the washing of water by the word [the gospel, the Word of God]” (Ephesians 5:26). So whereas the primary emphasis in Ezekiel 36:25 is on God’s forgiveness of sin and the whole process of spiritual cleansing, the sprinkling of clean water on His people may also have the specific meaning of the dissemination of the gospel among them.

Ezekiel 36:25-28 is a prophecy of the New Covenant with its better promises. Peace on earth and God’s showers of blessings will only come about when there is a radical change in human nature. Man’s “heart of stone”—his hardened, stubborn nature—must first be replaced with a pliant “heart of flesh” (verse 26). This change of heart was earlier described in these terms in Ezekiel 11:19-20. It will happen when Satan and his demons and their corrupt society are no longer present to harden man’s heart. The powerful presence of Jesus Christ will put the

humble fear of God in people's hearts as well. After that, and once people learn the truth of God's plan of salvation, most will eventually repent of their sins (36:31), trust in Jesus Christ to be their Savior and receive water baptism, whereupon God will fulfill this wonderful promise: "I will put My spirit within you" (verse 27).

Studying these scriptures demonstrates the spiritual message of the Old Testament, a concept often little understood in nominal Christianity. Misled by teachers who themselves do not understand the truth, many think that the words of the Old Testament belong on a dusty library shelf and have no bearing on their lives. Nothing could be further from the truth. Not only does much of the New Testament draw upon the language, events and spiritual direction of the Old Testament, but also the New Testament Church of God believed and practiced God's law as revealed there. Indeed, the point of receiving God's Spirit is to help us develop and grow in His character, which is expressed through His laws!

The rest of the chapter describes the condition of the earth during the millennial reign of Christ —peace, agricultural abundance, the rebuilding of cities, and a population explosion. "So they will say, 'This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden'" (verse 35). It will be a return to paradise, as we also read earlier in Isaiah 51:3: "For the LORD will comfort Zion, He will comfort all her waste places; He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in it, thanksgiving and the voice of melody."

2 Peter 2

Chapter 2

False teachers foretold, who shall bring in destructive doctrines and shall pervert many, but at last be destroyed by the judgments of God, 1-3. 4. In the antediluvians, 5. In the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, 6-8. The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly, as well as to punish the ungodly, 9. The character of those seducing teachers and their disciples; they are unclean, presumptuous, speak evil of dignities, adulterous, covetous, and cursed, 10-14. Have forsaken the right way, copy the conduct of Balaam, speak great swelling words, and pervert those who had escaped from error, 15-19. The miserable state of those who, having escaped the corruption that is in the world, have turned back like the dog to his vomit, and the washed swine to her wallowing in the mire, 20-22.

Notes on Chapter 2

Verse 1. But there were false prophets ?There were not only holy men of God among the Jews, who prophesied by Divine inspiration, but there were also false prophets, whose prophecies were from their own imagination, and perverted many. As there shall be false teachers among you ?At a very early period of the Christian Church many heresies sprung up; but the chief were those of the Ebionites, Cerinthians, Nicolaitans, Menandrians, and Gnostics, of whom many strange things have been spoken by the primitive fathers, and of whose opinions it is difficult to form any satisfactory view. They were, no doubt, bad enough, and their opponents in general have doubtless made them worse. By what name those were called of whom the apostle here speaks, we cannot tell. They were probably some sort of apostate Jews, or those called the Nicolaitans. See the preface.

Damnable heresies ?Heresies of destruction; such as, if followed, would lead a man to perdition. And these, they will bring in privately-cunningly, without making much noise, and as covertly as possible. It would be better to translate destructive heresies than damnable.

Denying the Lord that bought them ?It is not certain whether God the Father be intended here, or our Lord Jesus Christ; for God is said to have purchased the Israelites, Exodus 15:16, and to be the Father that had bought them, Deuteronomy 32:6, and the words may refer to these or such like passages; or they may point out Jesus Christ, who had bought them with his blood; and the heresies, or dangerous opinions, may mean such as opposed the Divinity of our Lord, or his meritorious and sacrificial death, or such opinions as bring upon those who hold them swift

destruction. It seems, however, more natural to understand the Lord that bought them as applying to Christ, than otherwise; and if so, this is another proof, among many, 1. That none can be saved but by Jesus Christ. 2. That through their own wickedness some may perish for whom Christ died.

Verse 2. Many shall follow; WILL follow, because determined to gratify their sinful propensities.

Pernicious ways. Their destructions; i.e. the heresies of destruction, or destructive opinions, mentioned above. But instead of, destructions, lasciviousness's or uncleanness's, is the reading of ABC, and upwards of sixty others, most of which are among the most ancient, correct, and authentic. This is the reading also of both the Syriac, all the Arabic, the Coptic, Ethiopica, Armenian, Slavonic, Vulgate, Chrysostom, Theophylact, OEcumenius, and Jerome. A very few, and those of little repute, have the word in the text.

By reason of whom ?These were persons who professed Christianity; and because they were called Christians, and followed such abominable practices, the way of truth-the Christian religion, was blasphemed. Had they called themselves by any name but that of Christ, his religion would not have suffered.

Verse 3. And through covetousness ?That they might get money to spend upon their lusts, with feigned words, with counterfeit tales, false narrations, of pretended facts, lying miracles, fabulous legends.

Whose judgment now of a long time ?From the beginning God has condemned sin, and inflicted suitable punishments on transgressors; and has promised in his word, from the earliest ages, to pour out his indignation on the wicked. The punishment, therefore, so long ago predicted, shall fall on these impure and incorrigible sinners; and the condemnation which is denounced against them slumbers not-it is alert, it is on its way, it is hurrying on, and must soon overtake them.

Verse 4. For if God spared not the angels ?The angels were originally placed in a state of probation; some having fallen and some having stood proves this. How long that probation was to last to them, and what was the particular test of their fidelity, we know not; nor indeed do we know what was their sin; nor when nor how they fell. St. Jude says they kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation; which seems to indicate that they got discontented with their lot, and aspired to higher honours, or perhaps to celestial domination. The tradition of their fall is in all countries and in all religions, but the accounts given are various and contradictory; and no wonder, for we have no direct revelation on the subject. They kept not their first estate, and they sinned, is the sum of what we know on the subject; and here curiosity and conjecture are useless.

But cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness But with chains of darkness confining them in Tartarus, delivered them over to be kept to judgment; or, sinking them into Tartarus, delivered them over into custody for punishment, to chains of darkness. Chains of darkness is a highly poetic expression. Darkness binds them on all hands; and so dense and strong is this darkness that it cannot be broken through; they cannot deliver themselves, nor be delivered by others. By chains of darkness we are to understand a place of darkness and wretchedness, from which it is impossible for them to escape.

Verse 5. Spared not the old world ?The apostle's argument is this: If God spared not the rebellious angels, nor the sinful antediluvians, nor the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, he will not spare those wicked teachers who corrupt the pure doctrines of Christianity.

Saved Noah the eighth ?Some think that the words should be translated, Noah the eighth preacher of righteousness; but it seems most evident, from 1 Peter 3:20, that eight persons are here meant, which were the whole that were saved in the ark, viz. Shem, Ham, Japhet, and their three wives, six; Noah's wife seven; and Noah himself the eighth. The form of expression, Noah the eighth, i.e. Noah and seven more, is most common in the Greek language.

World of the ungodly ?A whole race without God-without any pure worship or rational religion.

Verse 6. The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah; See the notes on Gen. 19, for an account of the sin and punishment of these cities. Making them an ensample ?These three words, are used to express the same idea; though the former may signify an example to be shunned, the second an example to be followed, and the third a simple exhibition. But these differences are not always observed.

Verse 7. Vexed with the filthy conversation. Being exceedingly pained with the unclean conduct of those lawless persons.

Verse 8. That righteous man dwelling among them ?Lot, after his departure from Abraham, A. M. 2086, lived at Sodom till A. M. 2107, a space of about twenty years; and, as he had a righteous soul, he must have been tormented with the abominations of that people from day to day.

The word, tormented, is not less emphatic than the word, grievously pained, in the preceding verse, and shows what this man must have felt in dwelling so long among a people so abandoned.

Verse 9. The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly ?The preservation and deliverance of Lot gave the apostle occasion to remark, that God knew as well to save as to destroy; and that his goodness led him as forcibly to save righteous Lot, as his justice did to destroy the rebellious in the instances already adduced. And the design of the apostle in producing these examples is to show to the people to whom he was writing that, although God would destroy those false teachers, yet he would powerfully save his faithful servants from their contagion and from their destruction. We should carefully observe, 1. That the godly man is not to be preserved from temptation. 2. That he will be preserved in temptation. 3. That he will be delivered out of it.

Verse 10. But chiefly them that walk ?That is, God will in the most signal manner punish them that walk after the flesh- addict themselves to sodomitical practices, and the lust of pollution; probably alluding to those most abominable practices where men abuse themselves and abuse one another.

Despise government. ?They brave the power and authority of the civil magistrate, practicing their abominations so as to keep out of the reach of the letter of the law; and they speak evil of dignities-they blaspheme civil government, they abhor the restraints laid upon men by the laws, and would wish all governments destroyed that they might live as they list. Presumptuous are they They are bold and daring, headstrong, regardless of fear.

Self-willed Self-sufficient; presuming on themselves; following their own opinions, which no authority can induce them to relinquish.

Are not afraid to speak evil of dignities. ?They are lawless and disobedient, spurn all human authority, and speak contemptuously of all legal and civil jurisdiction. Those in general despise governments, and speak evil of dignities, who wish to be under no control, that they may act as freebooters in the community.

Verse 11. Whereas angels, the meaning seems to be this: The holy angels, who are represented as bringing an account of the actions of the fallen angels before the Lord in judgment, simply state the facts without exaggeration, and without permitting any thing of a bitter, reviling, or railing spirit, to enter into their accusations. See Zechariah 3:1, and Jude 1:9; to the former of which Peter evidently alludes. But these persons, not only speak of the actions of men which they conceive to be wrong, but do it with untrue colourings, and the greatest malevolence. Michael, the archangel, treated a damned spirit with courtesy; he only said, The Lord rebuke thee, Satan! but these treat the rulers of God's appointment with disrespect and calumny.

Before the Lord. ?

Verse 12. But these, as natural brute beasts As those natural animals void of reason, following only the gross instinct of nature, being governed neither by reason nor religion.

Made to be taken and destroyed ?Intended to be taken with nets and gins, and then destroyed, because of their fierce and destructive nature; so these false teachers and insurgents must be treated; first incarcerated, and then

brought to judgment, that they may have the reward of their doings. And thus, by blaspheming what they do not understand, they at last perish in their own corruption; i.e. their corrupt doctrines and vicious practices.

Verse 13. They that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. ?Most sinners, in order to practise their abominable pleasures, seek the secrecy of the night; but these, bidding defiance to all decorum, decency, and shame, take the open day, and thus proclaim their impurities to the sun.

Spots-and blemishes ?They are a disgrace to the believer's name.

Sporting themselves ?Forming opinions which give license to sin, and then acting on those opinions; and thus rioting in their own deceits.

With their own deceivings ?But instead of this, AB, and almost all the versions and several of the fathers, have, in your love feasts, which is probably the true reading.

While they feast with you ?It appears they held a kind of communion with the Assembly, and attended sacred festivals, which they desecrated with their own unhallowed opinions and conduct.

Verse 14. Having eyes full of adultery ?Of an adulteress; being ever bent on the gratification of their sensual desires, so that they are represented as having an adulteress constantly before their eyes, and that their eyes can take in no other object but her. But instead of an adulteress, the Codex Alexandrinus, three others, with the Coptic, Vulgate, and one copy of the Itala, together with several of the fathers, have, of adultery.

Cannot cease from sin ?Which cease not from sin; they might cease from sin, but they do not; they love and practise it. Instead of, which cannot cease, several MSS. and versions have, and this requires the place to be read, Having eyes full of adultery and incessant sin. The images of sinful acts were continually floating before their disordered and impure fancy. Beguiling unstable souls ?The metaphor is taken from adulterers seducing unwary, inexperienced, and light, trifling women; so do those false teachers seduce those who are not established in righteousness.

Exercised with covetous practices ?The metaphor is taken from the agonistae in the Grecian games, who exercised themselves in those feats, such as wrestling, boxing, running, they proposed to contend in the public games. These persons had their hearts schooled in nefarious practices; they had exercised themselves till they were perfectly expert in all the arts of seduction, overreaching, and every kind of fraud.

Cursed children ?Such not only live under God's curse here, but they are heirs to it hereafter.

Verse 15. Which have forsaken the right way ?As Balaam did, who, although God showed him the right way, took one contrary to it, preferring the reward offered him by Balak to the approbation and blessing of God.

The way of Balaam ?Is the counsel of Balaam. He counselled the Moabites to give their most beautiful young women to the Israelitish youth, that they might be enticed by them to commit idolatry. See Clarke on Numbers 22:5. "Nu 23:1",

The son of Bosor ?Instead of, BOSOR two ancient MSS. and some of the versions have, Beor, to accommodate the word to the Hebrew text and the Septuagint. The difference in this name seems to have arisen from mistaking one letter for another in the Hebrew name, Beor, for Betsor or Bosor; tsaddi and ain which are very like each other, being interchanged.

Verse 16. The dumb ass, speaking with man's voice ?See Clarke on Numbers 22:28. The madness of the prophet. ?Is not this a reference to the speech of the ass, as represented in the Targums of Jonathan ben Uzziel and Jerusalem? "Woe to thee, Balaam, thou sinner, thou madman: there is no wisdom found in thee." These words contain nearly the same expressions as those in Peter.

Verse 17. These are wells without water ?Persons who, by their profession, should furnish the water of life to souls athirst for salvation; but they have not this water; they are teachers without ability to instruct; they are sowers, and

have no seed in their basket. Nothing is more cheering in the deserts of the east than to meet with a well of water; and nothing more distressing, when parched with thirst, than to meet with a well that contains no water. Clouds that are carried with a tempest ?In a time of great drought, to see clouds beginning to cover the face of the heavens raises the expectation of rain; but to see these carried off by a sudden tempest is a dreary disappointment. These false teachers were equally as unprofitable as the empty well, or the light, dissipated cloud.

To whom the mist of darkness is reserved ?That is, an eternal separation from the presence of God, and the glory of his power. They shall be thrust into outer darkness, Matthew 8:12; into the utmost degrees of misery and despair. False and corrupt teachers will be sent into the lowest hell; and be “the most downcast, underfoot vassals of perdition.”

It is scarcely necessary to notice a various reading here, which, though very different in sound, is nearly the same in sense. Instead of, clouds, which is the common reading, and mists, or perhaps more properly thick darkness, together, and, darkness, is the reading in ABC, sixteen others, Erpen’s Arabic, later Syriac, Coptic, Aethiopic, and Vulgate, and several of the fathers.

This reading Griesbach has admitted into the text.

Verse 18. They speak great swelling words of vanity ?The word signifies things of great magnitude, grand, superb, sublime; it sometimes signifies inflated, tumid, bombastic. These false teachers spoke of great and high things, and no doubt promised their disciples the greatest privileges, as they themselves pretended to a high degree of illumination; but they were all false and vain, though they tickled the fancy and excited the desires of the flesh; and indeed this appears to have been their object.

Those that were clean escaped ?Those who, through hearing, had believed, were perverted by those false teachers.

Verse 19. While they promise them liberty ?Either to live in the highest degrees of spiritual good, or a freedom from the heathen yoke; or what they might term needless restraints. Their own conduct showed the falsity of their system; for they were slaves to every disgraceful lust. For of whom a man is overcome ?This is an allusion to the ancient custom of selling for slaves those whom they had conquered and captivated in war. The ancient law was, that a man might either kill him whom he overcame in battle, or keep him for a slave. These were called servi, slaves, from the verb servare, to keep or preserve. And they were also called mancipia, from manu capiuntur, they are taken captive by the hand of their enemy. Thus the person who is overcome by his lusts is represented as being the slave of those lusts. See Romans 6:16, and the note there.

Verse 20. The pollutions of the world ?Sin in general, and particularly superstition, idolatry, and lasciviousness. These are called, miasmata, things that infect, pollute, and defile. The word was anciently used, and is in use at the present day, to express those noxious particles of effluvia proceeding from persons infected with contagious and dangerous diseases; or from dead and corrupt bodies, stagnant and putrid waters, marshes
The world is here represented as one large, putrid marsh, or corrupt body, sending off its destructive miasmata everywhere and in every direction, so that none can escape its contagion, and none can be healed of the great epidemic disease of sin, but by the mighty power and skill of God.

Verse 21. For it had been better for them not to have known ?For the reasons assigned above; because they have sinned against more mercy, are capable of more sin, and are liable to greater punishment.

The holy commandment ?The whole teaching is contained in this one commandment, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; and thy neighbour as thyself.” He who obeys this great commandment, and this by the grace of Christ is possible to every man, is saved from sinning either against his God or against his neighbour.

Verse 22. According to the true proverb ?This seems to be a reference to Proverbs 26:11:

kekeleb shab al keo; as the dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool repeateth his folly. In substance this proverb is found among the rabbins; so Midrash Ruth, in Sohar Chadash, fol. 62: Orphah is returned to her mire, Ruth persevered in spirit; and again, Ibid. fol. 64: "Orphah, which is nephesh habbehemith, the bestial soul, is returned to her mire."

2 Peter 3

The apostle shows his design in writing this and the preceding epistle, 1,2. Describes the nature of the heresies which should take place in the last times, 3-8. A thousand years with the Lord are but as a day, 9. He will come and judge the world as he has promised, and the heavens and the earth shall be burnt up, 10. How those should live who expect these things, 11,12. Of the new heavens and the new earth, and the necessity of being prepared for this great change, 13,14. Concerning some difficult things in Paul 's epistles, 15,16. We must watch against the error of the wicked, grow in grace, and give all glory to God, 17,18.

Notes on Chapter 3

Verse 1. This second epistle ?In order to guard them against the seductions of false teachers, he calls to their remembrance the doctrine of the ancient prophets, and the commands or instructions of the apostles, all founded on the same basis.

He possibly refers to the prophecies of Enoch, as mentioned by Jude, Jude 1:14,15; of David, Psalms 1:1, and of Daniel, Daniel 12:2, relative to the coming of our Lord to judgment: and he brings in the instructions of the apostles of Christ, by which they were directed how to prepare to meet their God.

Verse 3. Knowing this first ?Considering this in an especial manner, that those prophets predicted the coming of false teachers: and their being now in the Assembly proved how clearly they were known to God, and showed the believers at Pontus the necessity of having no intercourse or connection with them.

There shall come-scoffers ?Persons who shall endeavour to turn all religion into ridicule, as this is the most likely way to depreciate truth in the sight of the giddy multitude. The scoffers, having no solid argument to produce against revelation, endeavour to make a Scaramouch of some parts; and then affect to laugh at it, and get superficial thinkers to laugh with them. Walking after their own lusts ?Here is the true source of all infidelity. The Gospel of Jesus is pure and holy, and requires a holy heart and holy life. They wish to follow their own lusts, and consequently cannot brook the restraints of the Gospel: therefore they labour to prove that it is not true, that they may get rid of its injunctions, and at last succeed in persuading themselves that it is a forgery; and then throw the reins on the neck of their evil propensities. Thus their opposition to revealed truth began and ended in their own lusts.

The last days ?

Verse 4. Where is the promise of his coming? ?Perhaps the false teachers here referred to were such as believed in the eternity of the world: the prophets and the apostles had foretold its destruction, and they took it for granted, if this were true, that the terrestrial machine would have begun long ago to have shown some symptoms of decay; but they found that since the patriarchs died all things remained as they were from the foundation of the world; that is, men were propagated by natural generation, one was born and another died, and the course of nature continued regular in the seasons, succession of day and night, generation and corruption of animals and vegetables, for they did not consider the power of the Almighty, by which the whole can be annihilated in a moment, as well as created. As, therefore, they saw none of these changes, they presumed that there would be none, and they intimated that there never had been any. The apostle combats this notion in the following verse.

Verse 5. For this they willingly are ignorant of ?They shut their eyes against the light, and refuse all evidence; what does not answer their purpose they will not know. And the apostle refers to a fact that militates against their

hypothesis, with which they refused to acquaint themselves; and their ignorance he attributes to their unwillingness to learn the true state of the case.

By the word of God the heavens were of old ?

Verse 7. But the heavens and the earth, which are now ?The present earth and its atmosphere, which are liable to the same destruction, because the same means still exist, (for there is still water enough to drown the earth, and there is iniquity enough to induce God to destroy it and its inhabitants,) are nevertheless kept in store, treasured up, kept in God's storehouse, to be destroyed, not by water, but by fire at the day of judgment.

From all this it appears that those mockers affected to be ignorant of the Mosaic account of the formation of the earth, and of its destruction by the waters of the deluge; and indeed this is implied in their stating that all things continued as they were from the creation. But St. Peter calls them back to the Mosaic account, to prove that this was false; for the earth, were then formed, had perished by the flood; and that the present earth, day of judgment, perish by the fire of God's wrath.

Verse 8. Be not ignorant ?Though they are willfully ignorant, neglect not ye the means of instruction.

One day is with the Lord as a thousand years ?That is: All time is as nothing before him, because in the presence as in the nature of God all is eternity; therefore nothing is long, nothing short, before him; no lapse of ages impairs his purposes, nor need he wait to find convenience to execute those purposes. And when the longest period of time has passed by, it is but as a moment or indivisible point in comparison of eternity.

Verse 9. The Lord is not slack ?They probably in their mocking said, "Either God had made no such promise to judge the world, destroy the earth, and send ungodly men to perdition; or if he had, he had forgotten to fulfil it, or had not convenient time or leisure." To some such mocking the apostle seems to refer: and he immediately shows the reason why deserved punishment is not inflicted on a guilty world.

But is long-suffering? It is not slackness, remissness, nor want of due displacence at sin, that induced God to prolong the respite of ungodly men; but his long-suffering, his unwillingness that any should perish: and therefore he spared them, that they might have additional offers of grace, and be led to repentance-to deplore their sins, implore God's mercy, and find redemption through the blood of the Lamb.

As God is not willing that any should perish, and as he is willing that all should come to repentance, consequently he has never devised nor decreed the damnation of any man, nor has he rendered it impossible for any soul to be saved, either by necessitating him to do evil, that he might die for it, or refusing him the means of recovery, without which he could not be saved.

Verse 10. The day of the Lord will come ?See Matthew 24:43, to which the apostle seems to allude.

The heavens shall pass away with a great noise ?As the heavens mean here, and in the passages above, the whole atmosphere, in which all the terrestrial vapours are lodged; and as water itself is composed of two gases, eighty-five parts in weight of oxygen, and fifteen of hydrogen, or two parts in volume of the latter, and one of the former; (for if these quantities be put together, and several electric sparks passed through them, a chemical union takes place, and water is the product; and, vice versa, if the galvanic spark be made to pass through water, a portion of the fluid is immediately decomposed into its two constituent gases, oxygen and hydrogen;) and as the electric or ethereal fire is that which, in all likelihood, God will use in the general conflagration; the noise occasioned by the application of this fire to such an immense congeries of aqueous particles as float in the atmosphere, must be terrible in the extreme. Put a drop of water on an anvil, place over it a piece of iron red hot, strike the iron with a hammer on the part above the drop of water, and the report will be as loud as a musket; when, then, the whole strength of those opposite agents is brought together into a state of conflict, the noise, the thunderings, the innumerable explosions, (till every particle of water on the earth and in the atmosphere is, by the action of the fire, reduced into its component gaseous parts,) will be frequent, loud, confounding, and terrific, beyond every

comprehension but that of God himself. The elements shall melt with fervent heat ?When the fire has conquered and decomposed the water, the elements, the hydrogen and oxygen airs or gases, (the former of which is most highly inflammable, and the latter an eminent supporter of all combustion,) will occupy distinct regions of the atmosphere, the hydrogen by its very great levity ascending to the top, while the oxygen from its superior specific gravity will keep upon or near the surface of the earth; and thus, if different substances be once ignited, the fire, which is supported in this case, not only by the oxygen which is one of the constituents of atmospheric air, but also by a great additional quantity of oxygen obtained from the decomposition of all aqueous vapours, will rapidly seize on all other substances, on all terrestrial particles, and the whole frame of nature will be necessarily torn in pieces, and thus the earth and its works be burned up.

Verse 11. All these things shall be dissolved ?They will all be separated, all decomposed; but none of them destroyed. And as they are the original matter out of which God formed the terraqueous globe, consequently they may enter again into the composition of a new system; and therefore the apostle says, 2 Peter 3:13: we look for new heavens and a new earth-the others being decomposed, a new system is to be formed out of their materials. There is a wonderful philosophic propriety in the words of the apostle in describing this most awful event. What manner of persons ought ye to be ?Some put the note of interrogation at the end of this clause, and join the remaining part with the 12th verse, 2 Peter 3:12thus: Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be? By holy conversation and godliness, expecting and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God, Only those who walk in holiness, who live a godly and useful life, can contemplate this most awful time with joy. The word, which we translate hasting unto, should be tendered earnestly desiring, or wishing for; which is a frequent meaning of the word in the best Greek writers.

Verse 12. The heavens being on fire ?See Clarke on 2 Peter 3:10. It was an ancient opinion among the heathens that the earth should be burnt up with fire; so OVID, Met., lib. i. v. 256.

Verse 13. We, according to his promise, look for new heavens ?The promise to which it is supposed the apostle alludes, is found Isaiah 65:17: Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind; and Isaiah 66:22: For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed, Now, although these may be interpreted of the glory of the Gospel dispensation, yet, if Peter refer to them, they must have a more extended meaning. It does appear, from these promises, that the apostle says here, and what is said Revelation 21:27;; 22:14,15, that the present earth, though destined to be burned up, will not be destroyed, but be renewed and refined, purged from all moral and natural imperfection, and made the endless abode of blessed spirits. But this state is certainly to be expected after the day of judgment; for on this the apostle is very express, who says the conflagration and renovation are to take place at the judgment of the great day; see 2 Peter 3:7,8,10,12. That such an event may take place is very possible; and, from the terms used by Peter, is very probable. And, indeed, it is more reasonable and philosophical to conclude that the earth shall be refined and restored, than finally destroyed. But this has nothing to do with what some call the millennium state; as this shall take place when time, with the present state and order of things, shall be no more.

Verse 14. Seeing that ye look for such things ?As ye profess that such a state of things shall take place, and have the expectation of enjoying the blessedness of it, be diligent in the use of every means and influence of grace, that ye may be found of him-the Lord Jesus, the Judge of quick and dead, without spot-any contagion of sin in your souls, and blameless-being not only holy and innocent, but useful in your lives.

Verse 15. And account that the long-suffering of our Lord ?Conclude that God's long-suffering with the world is a proof that he designs men to be saved; even as our beloved brother Paul. "This epistle being written to those to whom the first epistle was sent, the persons to whom the Apostle Paul wrote concerning the long-suffering of God were the Jewish and Gentile Christians in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. Accordingly, we know he wrote to the Ephesians, 2:3-5,) to the Colossians, 1:21,) and to Timothy, 2:3,4,) things which imply that God's bearing with sinners is intended for their salvation. According to the wisdom given unto him ?That is, according to the measure of the Divine inspiration, by which he was qualified for the Divine work, and by which he was so capable of entering into the deep things of God. It is worthy of remark that Paul's epistles are ranked among the Scriptures; a term applied to those writings which are divinely inspired, and to those only.

Verse 16. As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things In which are some things hard to be understood. That is, if we retain the common reading, in or among which things, viz., what he says of the day of judgment, the resurrection of the body to be comprehended, and from which a wrong or false meaning may be taken.

This verse is also made a pretext to deprive the common people of reading the word of God; because the unlearned and unstable have sometimes wrested this word to their own destruction: but if it be human learning, and stability in any system of doctrine, that qualifies men to judge of these difficult things, then we can find many thousands, even in Europe, that have as much learning and stability as the whole college of cardinals, and perhaps ten thousand times more; for that conclave was never very reputable for the learning of its members: and to other learned bodies we may, with as much propriety, look up as infallible guides, as to this conclave. Besides, as it is only the unlearned and the unestablished (that is, young Christian converts) that are in danger of wresting such portions; the learned, that is, the experienced and the established in the knowledge and life of God, are in no such danger; and to such we may safely go for information: and these abound everywhere, especially in Protestant countries; and by the labours of learned and pious men on the sacred writings there is not one difficulty relative to the things which concern our salvation left unexplained. If the members of the Romish Church have not these advantages, let them go to those who have them; and if their teachers are afraid to trust them to the instruction of the Protestants, then let them who pretend to have infallibly written their exposition of these difficult places, also put them, with a wholesome text in the vulgar language, into the hands of their people, and then the appeal will not lie to Rome, but to the Bible, and those interpretations will be considered according to their worth, being weighed with other scriptures, and the expositions of equally learned and equally infallible men. We find, lastly, that those who wrest such portions, are those who wrest the other scriptures to their destruction; therefore they are no patterns, nor can such form any precedent for withholding the Scriptures from the common people, most of whom, instead of wresting them to their destruction, would become wise unto salvation by reading them. We may defy the Romish Church to adduce a single instance of any soul that was perverted, destroyed, or damned, by reading of the Bible; and the insinuation that they may is blasphemous.

Verse 17. Seeing ye know-before ?Seeing that by prophets and apostles you have been thus forewarned, beware, ĩťĭ...ĭ»ĭ±, keep watch, be on your guard; cleave to God and the word of his grace, lest ye be led away from the truth delivered by the prophets and apostles, by the error of the wicked, of the lawless- those who wrest the Scriptures to make them countenance their lusts, exorbitant exactions, and lawless practices.

Fall from your own steadfastness. ?From that faith in Christ which has put you in possession of that grace which establishes the heart.

Verse 18. But grow in grace ?Increase in the image and favour of God; every grace and Divine influence which ye have received is a seed, a heavenly seed, which, if it be watered with the dew of heaven from above, will endlessly

increase and multiply itself. He who continues to believe, love, and obey, will grow in grace, and continually increase in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, as his sacrifice, sanctifier, counsellor, preserver, and final Saviour. The life of a believer is a growth; he is at first born of God, and is a little child; becomes a young man, and a father in Christ. Every father was once an infant; and had he not grown, he would have never been a man. Those who content themselves with the grace they received when converted to God, are, at best, in a continual state of infancy: but we find, in the order of nature, that the infant that does not grow, and grow daily, too, is sickly and soon dies; so, in the order of grace, those who do not grow up into Jesus Christ are sickly, and will soon die, die to all sense and influence of heavenly things.

There are many who boast of the grace of their conversion; persons who were never more than babes, and have long since lost even that grace, because they did not grow in it. Let him that readeth understand.