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## Gospel Gleanings, March 27, 2022

Dear Friends,

If we study the various respected ancient literary works in terms of the number of ancient copies discovered and the proximity of those documents to the original writing, our New Testament stands out as a marvelous exception to the general rule. Several times more copies have been discovered than any other respected literary work, and many of them were discovered quite near the original writing, not centuries later.

God includes in the text of Scripture itself the strongest witness to its supernatural origin and its equally supernatural preservation. If we study Scripture contextually, it will bear its faithful testimony of God and His intended message to His people. Notice 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "[...that the man of God may be....]" Scripture's internal testimony reveals that God directed His Scripture to His people, to ["the man of God,"] not to the lost sinner. Thus when a New Testament passage teaches us to believe, trust God, repent, or live the faithful Christian life, we err by interpreting those words as directed to the lost. God directed them to His own born-again children, the "[man of God,]" as a faithful guide to show us the right way to think and live for Him and His glory today. As one of many examples, take the time to read the opening verses of every New Testament letter from Acts to Revelation. We learn the human identity of the original recipients of these letters, as well as the writer's description of their spiritual state. Not one letter was written to a lost sinner. Not one. All were written to born again people who needed the message contained in the letter for their present life and walk of faith. So do we.

We have every reason to trust our Bible as God's message to us, and for us, above any source of information we might consider.

[To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.] (Isaiah 8:20 KJV)

Which source do we choose for our instruction? A source without light? Or a word from God who preserved His light for us in His Book? I choose my Bible.

Lord bless,  
Joe Holder

Scripture—Self-Attesting

*But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; (Acts 2:14-16 KJV 1900)*

Occasionally you will hear or read someone who claims the dominant church of the age decided what writings to include in our "Bible" and what to omit. A study of ancient Christian writings, sometimes referred to as the "Church Fathers," refutes this claim. From the earliest writings especially, beginning in the first century, these men quoted Scripture and honored it as God's Book, His revelation to His people. Historical records of the church consistently affirm the centrality and the exclusivity of what we refer to as "Scripture" for faith and authority. Instead of humans deciding which writings to include in the Bible, the record affirms that the Bible itself has, from the beginning, been its own best witness. It is self-attesting. It contains the best proofs of its supernatural origin for the inquiring believer.

One of a long list of those internal evidences of Scripture's supernatural origin and preservation is exemplified in this week's study passage, fulfilled prophecy. While the overall message of the Book of Joel is one of devastation from an invading hoard of locusts that destroyed everything in their path, the Book also contains a vivid prophecy of the unique outpouring of the Spirit of God on the Day of Pentecost ten days after Jesus' ascension. Bible historians generally date Joel around 800 BC. Despite being written some 800 years before the actual event, Peter made his unqualified claim regarding Joel's accuracy, "This is that..." Peter didn't write that Joel's prophecy was partially fulfilled in Acts 2. He didn't write that Joel had two different events in mind, and one of them was fulfilled on that occasion. He spoke in uncompromising terms, "This is that..."

Bible scholars list over two hundred Old Testament prophecies that were fulfilled in the coming and life of Jesus. No other writing in human history so fully defies human intellect in its documentation of events hundreds, some over a thousand years in advance of their occurring.

Of the many ancient literary works uncovered and deciphered by archaeologists, the Bible stands alone in the number of supporting documents, as well as the proximity of those extant documents to the date of the original writing. For example, Aristotle lived and wrote around 384-322 BC. The earliest known document of his writings is dated around 900 AD. Forty-nine different documents of his writing have been discovered. Homer's Iliad was written around 900 BC. The earliest date a replica of this work was discovered is 125 AD. Some 643 documents of the Iliad have been discovered.

In contrast, the New Testament was written between 40-100 AD. The earliest copy of any part of it is dated around 125 AD. To date, over 24,000

copies of some portion of the New Testament have been discovered. By far, the New Testament is the best documented ancient writing of human history. Clearly God intended that His Book be emphatically affirmed and known.

In our Bible, we have a treasure beyond our ability to value as fully as it deserves. Why then do so many professing Christians take it for granted and neglect it or look to other sources for what they believe about God and how they should think and live?

Spend some time surveying the four Gospels in the New Testament. How many times did Jesus speak about the Old Testament, always affirming its supernatural origin and its supernatural preservation? When He responded to the Sadducees' trick question, He charged them with ignorance of the Scriptures, our Old Testament. (Matthew 22:29 KJV) He quoted one verse from the writings of Moses, written by Moses around 1500 BC. He built his whole argument against the Sadducees on the simple and preserved fact that God used present tense verbs in the verse, "***I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.***" Although these men died long before this occasion, God affirmed to Moses, "***I am***" their God, meaning they were yet alive in heaven, and He was no less their God then than during their lifetimes. Jesus affirmed full respect for both the divine origin of this writing, as well as its preserved accuracy through a multitude of hand-written copies. In John 10:34-35, Jesus quoted a verse from the Psalms of David, written around 1000 BC, affirming its precise preserved accuracy, "***...and the scripture cannot be broken.***" If He who wrote (By directing chosen men to write what He directed them to write) the Book said it could not be broken, we who believe in Him should follow His example and respect those writings no less than He did.

In the closing words of his second letter, Peter warned that professing believers would misinterpret and misrepresent the Scriptures "***...to their own destruction.***" (2 Peter 3:16 KJV) Today's populist Christian community sadly proves the accuracy of Peter's words. People who profess to believe in Jesus often ignore His words or misrepresent them to imply a meaning which they want to believe, but not what the writings of Scripture actually teach.

Consider just one example of this "Wresting," literally, twisting out of joint, and thus misrepresenting Scripture. A common teaching of our day says that a person must respond to the news of the gospel in faith to be saved, to be born again. When challenged that this idea is effectively a belief in salvation by works, these folks strongly

protest, "No, because faith is not a work." Their claim contradicts Jesus' own words.

*Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, **This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.** (John 6:28-29 KJV)*

These two verses appear in the simplest of terms and thought. The people asked Jesus a straightforward and simple question. Presumably, they wanted to do what God taught them to do, a noble desire, one that every professing believer should take to heart and strive to do. And Jesus answered their question in equally simple and straightforward words. If you want to "...work the works of God," believe on Jesus. If we accept Jesus' own words, we will accept that faith, in the New Testament translated from the same Greek word as "Believe," is in fact a work. In the New Testament, "Believe" is the verb form; "Faith" is the noun form of the same Greek word. If we accept Jesus' response to this question, we must conclude that the idea of salvation that requires a faith response from the individual for new birth or salvation is, in fact, a hybrid view of salvation by works, despite the protest. Scripture rules over human explanations.

When did you become your parents' child? When you were born? Or when you realized and believed they were your parents? Realization that God is our Father and we belong to His family is an amazing blessing not to be discounted, but it occurs after the fact, after our new birth; it neither causes our new birth or is instrumental in that new birth.

In full harmony with Jesus' words in this lesson, both Jesus and John affirm that the person who believes in Jesus is **already born again**. (John 5:24; 1 John 5:1 KJV) If the believer is already born again, the faith by which he believes cannot be a condition or cause of his new birth. It is rather imparted by and in that new birth. It is the byproduct of new birth, not the cause or the instrument of new birth. If we accept both Jesus' and John's inspired conclusion in these two passages, we will understand that every New Testament lesson that commands someone to believe in Jesus is addressed to people already born again, not lost sinners. There is no contradiction in Scripture, only in the minds of folks who misunderstand or misinterpret Scripture to fit their preconceived opinions about God and salvation.

I haven't seen a researched analysis of Scripture, but I suggest that well over ninety percent of the New Testament was written for the instructions of children of God, of born-again people, teaching us how to live life and trust God in the here and now, and less than ten percent was written to teach us about God and salvation, eternal salvation. In fact, in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Paul wrote that all of Scripture is given to and for "**the man of**

**God,**" not the lost sinner. Much of the wresting of Scripture that is so commonplace occurs when people wrongly interpret a passage that teaches a born-again person to believe, wrongly conclude it was written to lost sinners, telling them to believe. It is such errant interpretations that impose the serious obligation of every Bible student to read and to interpret Scripture in its context.

I could offer any number of examples of this wresting of Scripture. Consider just one. If you talk to someone about the Bible's teaching of God's eternal and unconditional election to salvation of a particular people in Jesus, the person to whom you are talking, if they do not believe this Bible doctrine, will often cite a brief phrase from Acts 10 and protest that the idea of election contradicts the Bible statement that "God is no respecter of persons." This is a sad example of extracting a few words from their Bible context and making them mean what you want them to mean. Below I copy two verses that make up part of the context of this clause.

*Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. (Acts 10:34-35 KJV)*

In context, the cited clause says far too much for the objector's liking. While they believe that a person must fear God and work righteousness to become accepted of God, to be saved, Peter, in inspired Scripture, states that a person who presently (He used present tense verbs for both actions) fears God and works righteousness **is** already accepted. A further challenge to the belief of salvation by works that these people hold appears in the broader context of this lesson. At the beginning of Acts 10, Luke describes Cornelius in clear details, including the undeniable conclusion that, long before hearing Peter preach Jesus for the first time in his life (If we accept the Bible record. Reasoning from any other idea becomes pure wishful speculation, not Bible fact), Cornelius already feared God and worked righteousness. Based on Peter's inspired observation, we must conclude that Cornelius was saved, "**accepted with him,**" prior to his hearing the gospel of Jesus, and thus prior to his believing in Jesus, the right exercise of his faith. Thus, interpreted in its context, the bare words quoted by the objector in no way support his/her interpretation of them. In fact, the language of the text refutes the objector's non-contextual wresting of the words.

Our loving God provided us with His teaching in Scripture. We honor Him by holding that Scripture in high—exclusive—regard, rightly and contextually interpreted, as our source of faith and life.

Bellflower, California

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

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<sup>1</sup> Our salvation is indeed free on our part. God in Jesus met all the conditions—and paid the full payment—required for our salvation. We should never overlook, when stating that our salvation is wholly free on our part, to praise God for the price He paid for our salvation. A study of the Biblical doctrine of redemption in Jesus will guide our thoughts in this point.