

GLEANINGS — March 20, A.D. 2016
Coming to the End...Again

Today's GLEANING is occasioned by a recent conversation between the author and a good friend concerning a subject that fascinates believers. Judging by various questions and statements recorded in the New Testament, it is one that has fascinated believers from the earliest days of the New Covenant! That subject is the last days and final coming of Jesus.

Christ's Olivet Discourse, recorded at Matthew 24, Luke 21, and Mark 13 is often central to any discussion of this. It is very popular to interpret that message, which Jesus gave shortly before His arrest, in a futuristic way. That means to take what Jesus foretold in the Olivet Discourse as having a fulfillment in His own generation's very, very distant future (*and possibly our generation's near future*).

Many of those who take a futuristic position on the Olivet Discourse also assert that they believe the Bible **literally**. As believers in God's inerrant, infallible word we do take the Bible literally – when it speaks literally. And we take it figuratively when it speaks figuratively, e.g. Christ's parables. Either way it always speaks with divine authority. When Jesus told His disciples that He was going up to Jerusalem to suffer and die, He spoke literally. When He said "I am the door of the sheep," He did not mean that He was a passageway for ovine critters! He spoke figuratively, as do other Holy Spirit inspired Bible passages.

With these preliminary considerations in mind let us reflect with joy on a precious promise God made in another discourse, recorded long before the one delivered by the incarnate Son on the Mount of Olives:

"Know therefore that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a **thousandth generation** with those who love Him and keep His commandments..." (Deuteronomy 7:9)

If those who take the Olivet Discourse futuristically also want to insist on the pervasively literal nature of all Scripture, they cannot consistently exclude that promise, any more than they can exclude this exhortation that was written by the same human author in the same context:

"Hear, O Israel! You are crossing over the Jordan today to go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than you, great cities **fortified to heaven....**" (Deuteronomy 9:1)

Did those ancient cities of which Moses spoke really have walls or battlements that reached the sun, moon, and stars, or even the much closer clouds in the heavens? If one's canon of interpretation is absolutely strict literalism, his absurd answer must be yes! So let's think through God's promise about a thousand generations according to the same literalism:

What is the duration of a "generation?" Even though it might have been longer in previous ages, let's use the typical forty years. That is the number of years of the wilderness wanderings in which God waited for one rebellious generation to die out. It is also the number of years between Christ's ascension to the Father's right hand c. A.D. 30 and the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. We note that in the Olivet Discourse, Jesus repeatedly and emphatically addresses **this** generation, i.e. His contemporaries of the first century.

Taking the thousand generations of Deuteronomy 7:9 just as literally as some want to take the millenium (*the 1,000 years mentioned in one passage, Revelation 20*), we whip out our common-core free mental calculators and sum up 40,000 years. God gave Moses the book of Deuteronomy circa 1,500 B.C. So about 38,500 years remain before God's promise to keep His covenant to a thousandth generation is **literally** fulfilled.

Surely, here is a call to compare Scripture with Scripture, to be faithful to all Scripture in interpreting any, and to not jump quickly onto any popular bandwagon of "last days" teaching.