

“A More Sure Word of Prophecy”

By Paul R. Blake

(Editor's note: An erring brother asked about 2Peter 1:19-21. “And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, [“A more sure word of prophecy” KJV - prb] which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” He advocates that this passage teaches that there is no single meaning of scripture for all persons in all times. His point was that interpretation of the scriptures is subject to the cultural needs and special circumstances of each period of history. ---prb)

This passage is poorly chosen if one wants to make scripture subjective. The word of God is absolute truth; it is objective. Man's word is subjective; it changes with the tides of fashion and contemporary thought. God's word is eternal. In this passage Peter is making the point that the prophecy that produced the scriptures did not originate with men, but rather it came from God. To misuse the phrase “private interpretation” to mean subjective individual interpretation and application is in error.

The context begins its development in verse 12 in which Peter writes of matters the readers already know and in which they are established. He emphasizes the need to remember “*the truth that is now with you.*” They already have “*the truth*” (singular definitive article and singular noun). There is only one truth.

In verse 16, Peter tells the readers that he did not “*follow*” (hezakolouthesantes - aorist; to wander from a correct course by following along behind a false guide; see 2:2, 15) “*cunningly devised fables*” (muthoi - fables; possibly Jewish fables - Titus 1:14, or Gnostic fictions). Instead, he declares that he was an eye witness of the Christ, and he heard the heavenly voice testify of the Son.

In verse 19, Peter writes: “*We have also a more sure word of prophecy...*”, a comparative statement. He is comparing the increased surety of the present revelation over that in which God spoke directly from heaven. We need to ask: what could be more sure than hearing the voice of God from heaven? Peter is saying that his testimony is made more convincing by the gift of prophecy. In other words, while the testimony of the few eye witnesses is believable, it is made more so by the many subsequent prophets who would speak the same word about the Christ.

In verse 20, the emphasis Peter places on his declaration indicates that it is of a singularly fundamental nature. Ginoskontes means “this firstly knowing” and is the present active participle of ginosko, “know.” It is presented in an imperative setting as a command. The reader must recognize that this truth is of primary importance.

Prophecy of scripture (propheteia graphes) refers back to the prophecy of verse 19 and at the same time points out that it is written down. It must be understood at this point that what is written is that which the prophet received from God by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, the speaker is a false prophet (pseudoprophetes). He is either from God, or he is a liar.

True prophecy can be both foretelling or forth-telling what God has given the prophet by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Prophecy is not neutral; it is either true (alethes) or false (pseudos). As prophecy is not qualified by pseudos in this context, and because Peter speaks of it with approval, it can be safely assumed that it is true prophecy.

Therefore, the noun subject and the point of verse 20 is the gerund phrase “*the writing of true prophecy.*” No writing of true prophecy is of any private interpretation. Whatever private interpretation may be, the writing of true prophecy cannot be part of it.

“Private” (idiom) means “one's own, special (to one's self).” Whatever interpretation may be, with regard to writing true prophecy, it cannot be one's own or unique to one's self. *“Interpretation”* (epilysis) in the noun form is used only one time in all of scripture. The verb form is found in Mark 4:34, *“He expounded to them all things,”* and Acts 19:39, *“it shall be determined in a lawful assembly.”* The word connotes a definitive ruling in a matter or an authorized explanation. Vines writes: “from epiluo, to loose, solve explain, denotes a solution, explanation, literally a release. Noun form, interpretation.” Thayer states: “(verb form) to unloose, to untie anything bound or sealed up; to clear (a controversy), decide, settle, explain what is obscure and hard to understand. Noun form - a loosening, unloosening, interpretation.”

It must be understood at this point that it is not the scripture itself under consideration, but rather the origin of the scripture. Ginetai, “becomes, arises, comes into being,” is a verb that speaks to the origin of the scripture and does not describe the scripture itself. If scripture itself is not subject to private interpretation, then the verb would be esti (is). Instead, it is ginetai (comes into being); the origin of scripture is not subject to private interpretation. A literal, proper reading of the text would therefore be “every writing of prophecy does not come into being by one's own releasing.” In contemporary speech we could say, “no scripture comes from a private individual's own will to release it.”

This explanation is in harmony with verse 21, which speaks to the origin of the writing of prophecy. *“For prophecy never came by the will of man”* reinforces two aspects of this argument. First, *“prophecy ... came”* corresponds to the subject phrase of the previous verse, that is, the origin of scripture and not the scriptures themselves. Second, *“will of man”* corresponds to the private interpretation of verse 20. The intents of man have nothing to do with the origins of scripture, nor do the intents of man have anything to do with the revealing of scripture. God released the scriptures by sending the Holy Spirit to guide the speaking and writing of the prophets.

Indeed, this is the wrong text to use if one wants to make the Bible subjective and relative to the times and seasons. This passage tells us that scripture only came from God's choice to release it. He is the author of the eternal, unchangeable word. Anyone who wants to make it less than what God made will have to answer to Him one day. (Heb. 13:8; 1Peter 1:23; Deut. 4:2; Prov. 30:5-6; Rev. 22:18-19)

A Moments Wisdom

--When you were born, you cried and the world rejoiced. Live your life so that when you die, the world cries and you rejoice.

--The real measure of a man's wealth is what he has invested in eternity.

--Everyone has beauty, but not everyone sees it.

--Thank God for what you have, trust God for what you need.

--We often take for granted the things that we always should be giving thanks for.

--Going to church regularly is like making a path in the forest -- the more often you use it, the less obstructions you'll find in the way.

--There are some whose faith is not strong enough to bring them to services, but they foolishly expect it to take them to heaven.

--The chains of habit are generally too small to be felt until they are too strong to be broken.

--If you don't live it, you don't really believe it.