

the sentence. I conclude, therefore, that if any part of the Bible is literal, we are thus to consider this chapter of Peter.

In the second place, this passage does not teach that the earth will be annihilated.

The prevailing opinion in this country, probably, has been, and still is, that the destruction of the world described by Peter will amount to annihilation; that the matter of the globe will cease to be. But in all ages there have been many who believe that the destruction will be only the ruin of the present economy of the world, but not its utter extinction. And surely Peter's description does not imply annihilation of the matter of the globe. He makes fire the agent of the destruction, and, in order to ascertain the extent of the ruin that will follow, we have only to enquire what effect combustion will have upon matter. The common opinion is, that intense combustion actually destroys or annihilates matter, because it is thereby dissipated. But the chemist knows that not one particle of matter has ever been thus deprived of existence; that fire only changes the form of matter, but never annihilates it. When solid matter is changed into gas, as in most cases of combustion, it seems to be annihilated, because it disappears; but it has only assumed a new form, and exists as really as before. Since, therefore, biblical and scientific truth must agree, we may be sure that the apostle never meant to teach that the matter of the globe would cease to be, through the action of fire upon it; nor is there any thing in his language that implies such a result, but most obviously the reverse.

If these things be so, then, in the third place, we may infer that Peter did not mean to teach that the matter of the globe would be in the least diminished by the final conflagration. I doubt not the sufficiency of divine power partially or wholly to annihilate the material universe. But heat, however intense, has no tendency to do this; it only gives matter a new form. And heat is the only agency which the apostle represents as employed. In short, we have no evidence, either from science or revelation, that the minutest atom of matter has ever been destroyed since the original creation; nor have we any more evidence that any of it ever will be reduced to the nothingness from which it sprang. The prevalent ideas upon this subject all result from erroneous notions of the effect of intense heat.