

Adult

# SABBATH SCHOOL LESSONS

October-December 1985



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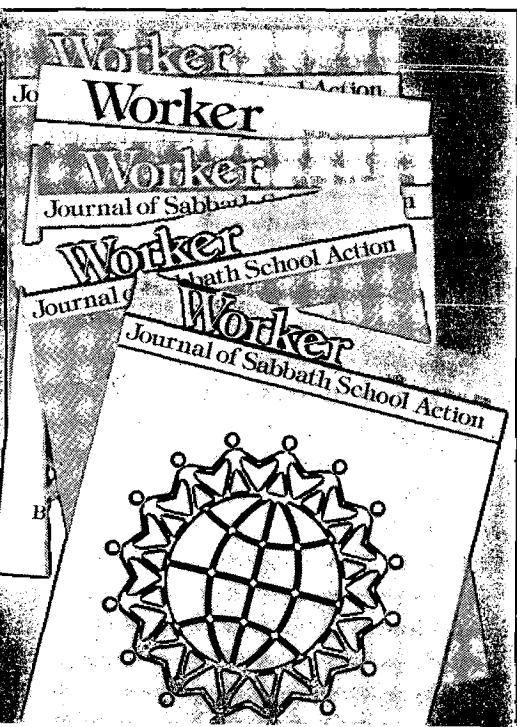
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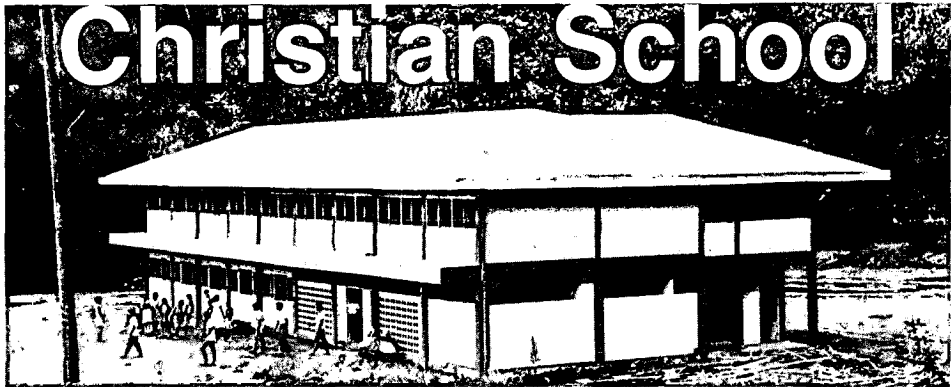
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# Your Generosity Helped Build A Christian School



Main classroom block of boarding High School at Papeete, Tahiti. This school was officially opened in 1984. This project received \$US300,976 in the 1st Quarter of 1983. Photo Credit: R.C. Swendson.

That's right. The special projects portion (\$300,976) of your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering, First Quarter, 1983, helped erect a new classroom building for the boarding high school in Papeete, Tahiti. The school opened officially last year.




Three Sabbath School members representative of the three major areas of the Solomon Islands. The boy is from Eastern Solomons, the girl in the center from Malaita and the girl on the right from Western Solomons. Photo credit: R.V. Moe.

This quarter the South Pacific Division (formerly Australasian Division) presents some exciting and important special projects:

- A youth and evangelistic center (Solomon Islands).
- A new elementary school and an evangelistic youth center (Vanuatu—formerly New Hebrides).
- Medical clinics and lamb shelters (East Solomon Islands).

The "lamb" shown here have no Sabbath School room. This is all right on sunny days. But rain falls heavily and unexpectedly in the Solomon Islands.

Please give generously this **Thirteenth Sabbath** and all quarter long so that all of these important projects can be achieved.

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## Introduction to Second Peter

# Ideals for Christians

The apostle Peter is the author of both the first and second epistles that bear his name. The recipients of the second letter are, in general, identical to those of the first, namely, Christians in Asia Minor or in the country now known as Turkey.

The apostle knows and loves the congregations to whom he writes. As with his first letter, the theme of the second epistle is pastoral, but its purpose is different. Peter acknowledges that his readers have been grounded in the faith but is anxious for them to grow in the principal Christian virtues (chapter 1). Aware that false teachers have been unsettling the believers, he uses forceful language to warn against the troublemakers' wiles (chapter 2). He presents the hope of Christ's return as the bulwark against skepticism and apostasy, and urges his readers so to live that they may be found blameless at their Lord's appearing (chapter 3).

### SECOND PETER OUTLINED

Chapter	Exhortation	Summary
1	Grace and knowledge	"Grow up"
2	Warning	"Watch out"
3	Anticipation	"Look up"



## Information About the Writer of This Quarter's Lessons

Although now retired, Bernard E. Seton has held a wide variety of positions during his forty-three years of denominational work. Among these positions are: editor at the Sentinel Publishing Company in Cape Town, South Africa; Sabbath School and Medical Secretary of the Southern European Division; Secretary of the Northern European Division; President of the British Union; and Associate Secretary of the General Conference. Earlier in his career Dr. Seton served as a teacher, missionary, minister, and evangelist. He and his wife Marjorie have a son and a daughter, Gerard and Hilary. Dr. Seton loves classical music, especially Beethoven. He enjoys playing the piano, painting, and reading. Recognized as an authority on hymnology, he has written a book entitled *Our Heritage of Hymns* that has been published by Andrews University Press.

**Supplemental Book:** *Meet Pastor Peter* by Bernard E. Seton is published by the Review and Herald Publishing Association. It is available at your Adventist Book Center.

Because the Second Epistle of Peter was not addressed to a specific community other than the general Christian community, it can apply readily to Christians in the twentieth century. Particularly is this true in the light of Peter's exhortation to his readers to be faithful in preparing for Christ's return. Peter draws a sharp contrast between those who will be ready for the "day of the Lord" and the false teachers, skeptics, and half-hearted Christians who will not be. The author's approach in this book is as practical as Peter's was in his second epistle. Written to encourage verse-by-verse study, *Meet Pastor Peter* shows us the general sweep of Peter's letters, the background from which he wrote, and the modern implications of his long-ago counsels.

# Promises of Power

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 2 Peter 1:1-4.

**DAY 1** MEMORY TEXT: "He brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone" (John 1:42).

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** Those who have "escaped the corruption that is in the world" will grow in grace and peace through the knowledge of God.

## OVERVIEW—2 Peter 1:1-4

Verse 1	Verse 2a	Verse 2b	Verse 3	Verse 4
Salutation	Challenge	How accomplished?		What is done?
From Peter to those of like faith	Grace and peace be multiplied unto you	Through personal acquaintance with Christ	Gifts God bestows enable us to do all things He wants done	Promised blessings include restoration of God's image in the soul

**INTRODUCTION:** We Seventh-day Adventists have emphasized consistently the primacy of the Bible in our doctrinal teaching. We have taken pride in displaying the biblical foundation for our distinctive as well as our general beliefs. Doing so has been commendable, but it also has posed a danger. Some have misused the proof-text approach by attempting to join scattered verses or passages that may not have been intended to keep each other company. How can we escape the pitfalls that are inherent in such a procedure and enlarge our knowledge and appreciation of God's Word in the right way? The answer lies in a study of the book as its divine Source caused it to be written. Beyond dispute is the fact that God decided to communicate His will mainly by means of many books, small and large, that would eventually be gathered into one all-embracing volume, the Holy Bible. Those books are the vessels into which the Creator has poured His revelation for our study and has conveyed His thinking on the past, present, and future of His creation.

This quarter we will study the Second Epistle of Peter, with a passing glance at the Epistle of Jude. A verse-by-verse study of Peter's message will enable us to enjoy the letter as closely as possible in the form in

which the Holy Spirit moved the apostle to write it. We shall come to see why Peter wrote as he did. The inspiration that came to him in the first century provided him with a message that is well suited to the close of the twentieth century. The three chapters in Peter's second epistle abound in high-level spiritual counsel that presents the inward law as the moral standard for all Christians.

During the next thirteen weeks we should discover the background to counsel that previously may have puzzled us. Glimpses of the courage of early believers may lead us to greater faithfulness in our own Christian witness. As we meet the Lord Jesus Christ in the sacred pages of these epistles, we need to allow Him to make us ready for His coming.

DAY I. SALUTATION (2 Peter 1:1).

2

**Meet the writer.** In John 1:42 we find Jesus addressing Andrew's brother as *Simon*, which in Hebrew or Aramaic means "hearing with acceptance." In the Bible record that name was given for the first time to the son of Jacob and Leah (Gen. 29:33), and later became that by which Peter would be known to his family and friends.

At the first encounter with Simon, Jesus revealed His ability to assess character and potential (John 1:42). He looked into the face of His prospective recruit and liked what He saw, but also was aware of inherent weaknesses. However, Peter's strengths outweighed his frailties. The sterling qualities that Jesus recognized justified the gift of a new name, *Cephas* (Aramaic), or *Petros* (Greek) from which the name *Peter* is de-





rived. It now is thought to signify a small stone. (See Matt. 16:18, 19.) In spite of the prominence given Peter in the story of the early church, Peter was no more than one among the twelve disciples, and his early prominence soon gave way to Paul's dynamic gifts.

**What is unusual about the way that Peter introduces himself? 2 Peter 1:1.**

---

Some modern versions use "bond servant" to translate the word *servant*, but even that term does not convey the full force of the original word. *Doulos* is the common New Testament Greek term for "slave" and is used to express the depth of Christ's self-abasement in the incarnation (Phil. 2:7). In his epistle Peter makes no claim to primacy. Instead, we discover a voluntary self-effacement in the presence of his Lord.

At the same time, he accepts humbly the designation "apostle" or "one sent." His doing so harks back to the commissioning of the Twelve whom Jesus "sent forth." (See Matt. 10:5-8; Mark 6:30; Luke 6:13.) They were not consistently given that cherished title until after the resurrection (Acts 1:2, 25, 26), and some beside the Twelve were also honored by the same designation. (See Acts 14:14.)

**Meet the first readers.** The readers introduced in the second part of verse 1 are those who have accepted Jesus as their Saviour.

There is no boasting in Peter's salutation in verse 1. In respect to the gospel, the apostle sees himself in the same class as his fellow Christians—in need of forgiveness and redemption.

The words *like precious* derive from a political term and suggest "of equal standing" or "equally privileged." "Like precious faith" refers to acceptance of and faith in Christ's redemption. It emphasizes the equality of all Christians in respect of salvation. Just as "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), so "whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17).

**Through what means is "like precious faith" made available to those who seek it? 2 Peter 1:1, last part.**

---

Peter briefly describes the source of saving faith. It begins with the righteousness or right doing or justice of Christ. Christ's death leaves God's righteousness intact (Rom. 3:26). God's law has not been done away with in order that He might save us from sin. Eternal life is an untarnished gift. The Father has not diminished His righteousness when He enables us to "be made the righteousness of God in him [Christ]" (2 Cor. 5:21).

Greek construction suggests that this last part of verse 1 could be translated more accurately as "our God and Saviour Jesus Christ." The writer is speaking of one Person, namely, Jesus, through whom the Father has brought about our redemption. (See Acts 4:12; 2 Cor. 5:19.) This Son is very God, the Second Person of the Godhead. It is this Divine Being whose righteousness secures our pardon.

**DAY 3** II. CHALLENGE TO CONTINUE GROWING IN GRACE AND PEACE

(2 Peter 1:2).

The same challenge as that mentioned here is found in 1 Peter 1:2. Although Peter's greeting follows a pattern that was common in the first century its content and authority are specifically Christian. Peter's prayer that his readers receive the gifts of grace and peace in greater measure and in higher quality than they had hitherto enjoyed demonstrates a possibility that challenges us even today to reach a higher plane in our Christian experience.

The word translated "grace" originally stood for that quality which gives pleasure or joy. It became linked to concepts of beauty, loveliness, and what we now imply by "gracefulness." But New Testament writers gave the word still deeper significance, relating it to the divine quality that God's love extends toward sinners. Its ultimate revelation comes in salvation—"by grace are ye saved through faith" (Eph. 2:8).

Peter's prayer that his readers might have an increase in "peace" was not so much a desire for absence of strife as for the divine gift that follows release from sin and its condemnation. As with grace, so with peace: it is God's gift, from Himself and His Son (John 14:27; Phil. 4:7). The apostle wishes both grace and peace to increase in the lives of church members, and he tells how such an increase may be accomplished.

**How may we receive grace and peace in our lives? 2 Peter 1:2, second part.**

---

Peter here uses a significant Greek word (*epignosis*) for "knowledge," and, in so doing, probably refers to more than a passing knowledge or a mere nodding acquaintance with a person. The reference is to a deep personal relationship and a saving experience with the Father and the Son. This is often expressed as "experiential knowledge," that which we gain by intimate experience. The apostle uses that word and its less emphatic form (*gnosis*) eleven times in his letter, as a noun or as a verb. This suggests that he places great value on our acquiring that knowledge. How diligent, then, we ought to be in enlarging our personal acquaintance with the Godhead!

We gain such full knowledge through careful study of the Bible and by prayerfully applying its teachings. The Scriptures paint word portraits of the Father and the Son, encouraging us to develop such godlike qualities. Bible study that does not produce such holy character fails in its most practical purpose. Conversely, a faithful study of Peter's second epistle will, if we allow it, stimulate our growth in grace and will deepen the quality of that peace "which passeth all understanding" (Phil. 4:7).

**DAY 4** III. GIFTS FOR GODLINESS (2 Peter 1:3).

God and Christ repeatedly are blamed by sinful beings for the troubles that afflict humankind. Such blame is cruelly unjust. It would be just as reasonable to blame Henry Ford for all who have been maimed or killed

by Ford cars since he put the first one on the road! However, we are aware that roadside tragedies usually are the fault of those using automobiles and not of the inventor. The fault in our lives, then, lies not with our Maker but in ourselves and with the sinful human predicament.

The facts expose Satan's lie against God and His Son. They created human beings in Their own image, with the potential for infinite development, supplying all that was needed for "life and godliness." The reference in verse 3 indicates that they continue to supply all that is needed for abundant Christian living.

**READ** verse three through several times until you are sure you understand what it is saying. What does divine power provide for us? How inclusive is what God promises?

The word translated *godliness* refers to "piety" and became associated by Christians with the thought of worship and thus that excellence of life that should be seen in those who adore their Maker.

There is no need for argument over the identity of the Giver of the gifts. The Father and the Son unitedly bestow eternal life on those who will receive the gifts. But all blessings come to us through Jesus, "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30).

**What provision has made it possible for us to receive God's life-bringing gifts if we choose to do so? 2 Peter 1:3, last part.**

---

It is good to know that eternal life can be ours, but unless we know how to receive it the news tantalizes rather than assures; and God never teases or frustrates His children. The life-giving gifts can be ours through the personal, experiential knowledge of the One who has invited us to share in His "glory and virtue." (See 1 Cor. 1:9; 1 Peter 2:9.)

It is made clear here that it is the divine splendor and goodness that provide both the incentive and the power for us to receive eternal life and to attain moral excellence.

#### DAY IV. PROMISES WITH POWER (2 Peter 1:4).

# 5

Although, for convenience sake, we examine Peter's letter in short sections, we should maintain continuity in our study, seeking to follow the writer's stream of thought. Verses 3 and 4 belong together. The "whereby" or "through which" or "by means of which" in verse 4 point back to the "glory and virtue" at the close of verse 3. Peter declares that these—God's spiritual wealth and generosity—already have provided us with a store of "precious and very great promises."

**Consider some of the magnificent promises that might have been impressed on Peter's mind as he wrote these words.**

As we range over the thousands of promises that are found in the Bible, there are three limitations that Peter points out that need to be observed

in order for us to understand more fully what he had in mind:

1. The promises should concern "life and godliness" (verse 3).
2. The promises should encourage us to be "partakers of the divine nature" (verse 4).
3. The selection should be drawn largely from the Old Testament (the only Bible known to early Christians) and possibly the words of Jesus as given in the Gospels, because the remainder of the New Testament was either not written, not circulating, or not yet recognized as inspired.

With these restrictions a rich selection of divine assurances come readily to most Bible lovers' minds. A few of these are listed below in the order of their appearance in the Bible:

Gen. 3:15; 49:10	Dan. 2:44; 7:27; 9:24-27
Ex. 19:5, 6	Micah 5:2; 7:18, 19
Job 19:25, 26	Matt. 1:21; 11:28-30; 24:12-14, 29-35
Ps. 51:17; 91:1, 2	Luke 2:10-14; 19:10
Isa. 7:14; 65:17	John 1:12, 13, 29; 3:16, 17;
Jer. 31:31-34	8:12; 11:25, 26

**DAY 6** *Sharers in the divine nature.* In the middle of 2 Peter 1:4 the writer reveals God's overall purpose in giving us His treasure of promises. They point to the power that is available to all who wish to partake of the divine nature.

**THINK IT THROUGH:** The fact that we are studying these lessons indicates our interest in such a proposal, but do we currently understand the demands that such an ambition makes upon those who cherish it? Are we sure that we want to become "partakers of the divine nature"? Are we ambitious to become as loving, as patient, as self-sacrificing as God Himself? Do we *want* to follow the example of the One who "so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son"? Do we *want* to become holy, sinless, and unselfish? That is our Maker's ambition for us. Is it ours? Let this second clause in 2 Peter 1:4 probe the quality of our spiritual desires and evaluate their sincerity. The power for their fulfillment is inherent in the promises we have just reviewed.

While the call to godlikeness comes when we are "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1), the last part of 2 Peter 1:4 pictures us as having escaped from that sorry condition. As noted in our study of verse 1, Peter's letter is addressed to those who "have obtained like precious faith" with him and other Christians. That has been gained by fleeing from or turning one's back upon the defiling passions that engulf "a world that is sunk in vice" (verse 4, Jerusalem Bible), and that cause shipwreck to many who have begun to follow Christ.

More than 80 years ago Ellen White wrote these words that are disturbingly up to date today: "We are living in the midst of an 'epidemic of crime,' at which thoughtful, God-fearing men everywhere stand aghast. The corruption that prevails, it is beyond the power of human pen to describe. Every day brings fresh revelations of political strife, bribery, and fraud. Every day brings its heart-sickening record of violence and law-

lessness, of indifference to human suffering, of brutal, fiendish destruction of human life. Every day testifies to the increase of insanity, murder, and suicide. Who can doubt that satanic agencies are at work among men with increasing activity to distract and corrupt the mind, and defile and destroy the body?"—*The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 142, 143.

**DAY 7 FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:** Read *The Desire of Ages*, pages 139, 244-246, 411-414, 811-817, in order to appreciate better Peter's background and experience.

Meditate on the following:

"It is the glory of God to give His virtue to His children. He desires to see men and women reaching the highest standard; and when by faith they lay hold of the power of Christ, when they plead His unfailing promises, and claim them as their own, when with an importunity that will not be denied they seek for the power of the Holy Spirit, they will be made complete in Him."—*The Acts of the Apostles* p. 530.

"Sin not only makes a man unrighteous, it robs him of the glory of God. And if you understand that, you will realize how futile it is ever to think that you, by your works or activities, can ever be fit to stand in the presence of God. Before we can truly know Him, and have communion with Him, let alone stand before the glory of His presence, we must have something of His glory. However good we may be, and however moral, we never shall and never can develop a Divine glory. But without it we can never see God and never stand in His presence. . . . What a terrible thing sin is! It robs us not only of righteousness, it robs us of 'the glory of God.' What a wonderful salvation this is! It not only gives me pardon and righteousness, it gives me glory: 'Whom he justified, them he also glorified.' Whatever we were before, if we have this faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His perfect work, we are clothed with His righteousness, and something of the glory of God is implanted within us. We are 'made partakers of the divine nature' (2 Peter 1:4)."—D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapters 3:20 to 4:25* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), pp. 52, 53.

**SUMMARY:** In the light of the "exceeding great and precious promises" we have reviewed in this lesson there can be no excuse for the Christian not to grow in grace and peace. But doing so demands a personal acquaintance with God through Christ that comes only from daily study of the Word and is accompanied by a growing trust and confidence in the fact that God wants us to have "all things that pertain to life and godliness."

**APPLICATION:**

- What basic challenge is offered in this introductory section of Second Peter, and how do I respond to it?
- What have I learned about God and personal faith from this study that I can share with others?
- How can I put what I have learned into practice in my life during the week to come? What errors should I avoid?
- How can I fulfill the potential of the privileges in life and godliness that the Lord makes possible for me?

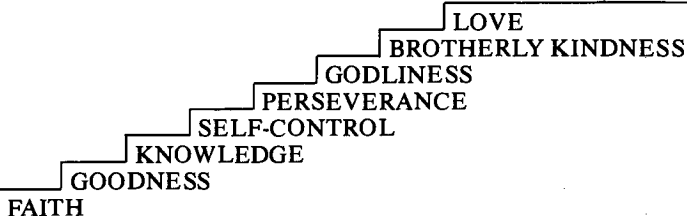
# Program for Progress

**THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 2 Peter 1:5-11.**

**DAY 1** **MEMORY TEXT:** "The child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him."  
 "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2:40, 52).

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** Spiritual growth is essential to spiritual life. Those who do not grow are on the way to death, or, at best, will remain stunted Christians.

## PETER'S LADDER—2 Peter 1:5-7 (NIV)



**INTRODUCTION:** In Lesson 1 we found Peter reviewing the basic spiritual blessings that God gives to those who accept His salvation. In this week's study we find the apostle offering a list of attributes that all who have accepted Christ and become candidates for the kingdom of heaven can cultivate by God's blessing. His list merits our close attention. Cultivation of these qualities will play a vital part in preparing us for service here and for life hereafter.

In the area of Christian growth, as in other major areas of development, Jesus is our example. He grew in the natural, ideal way, becoming a model boy who must have brought great joy to his parents' hearts. He also "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." His example sets the pattern for the spiritual development of His followers. Each Christian is to be born of the Spirit and to grow "to mature manhood, measured by nothing less than the full stature of Christ" (Eph. 4:13, NEB). That growth begins with birth, the new birth by which we abandon the old and embark on a new Christ-oriented existence that is marked by a steady spiritual growth and has Christlikeness as its goal.

The growing Christian is engaged in a "Pilgrim's Progress" from this world to that which is to come. Unlike Bunyan's classic, this "progress"

is not delivered under the similitude of a dream, but concerns the daily triumphs and failures of aspiring Christians. Peter himself, with the ups and downs and ups of his discipleship, is well equipped by his experience to help guide his fellow travelers along the Christian way.

The passage assigned for this week's study presents a program for progress in spiritual growth. It shows that there is no instant full-fledged maturity. Instead, it outlines a steady development that produces a balanced Christian character that will ensure our being fruit-bearing followers of our Lord Jesus Christ. (See verses 8-11.)

## DAY I. PETER'S LADDER (2 Peter 1:5-7).

**2**

What underlying traits are involved in the first three rungs in the ladder of Christian development? 2 Peter 1:5.

The phrase "and beside this" is not an afterthought but a logical consequence. Several modern versions bring out the full force of the opening phrase by translating it as "for this very reason," thereby linking verses 5 through 11 with verses 1 through 4, and making each passage more significant. The first four verses of this chapter deal with the Godhead's deeds that make our salvation possible. The next seven verses concern ways in which we can cooperate with God through character development. The motive power for our efforts derives from the all-sufficient saving acts of Father and Son on our behalf.

The phrase "giving all diligence" may have become weak by overfamiliarity. Variant translations help restore its impact: "Make every effort" (RSV), "you must do your utmost from your side" (Phillips), "you should try your hardest" (NEB). The original word from which these concepts are derived is also associated with "haste" or "eagerness," thus introducing a sense of urgency into Peter's counsel.

Then follows the advice that has often been described as "Peter's ladder." None of the steps represents self-salvation. Each one is based on a Heaven-imparted attribute that represents cooperation with what God already has done. As the Greek implies, these attributes are "placed alongside" God's initiative, creating a fruitful partnership for spiritual development.

"Add to your faith virtue." To the initial attribute of faith we should exert our spiritual energies to add "moral excellence" (NASB) or "goodness" (NIV). Peter urges us to cooperate with God in building "virtue" or "goodness" into our own characters. (Compare with Phil. 4:8.)

"After receiving the faith of the gospel, our first work is to seek to add virtuous and pure principles, and thus cleanse the mind and the heart for the reception of true knowledge."—*Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 552.

"Add . . . to virtue knowledge." The apostle gives the word *knowledge* spiritual value by making it refer to the Christian's knowledge of God and His will. This knowledge should supply principles that guide the believer's daily conduct and spark his or her moral aspirations. At conversion we are given the nucleus of such knowledge, but that is not enough. Our Lord expects us to grow in spiritual understanding, gaining clearer insights into Christian morality and becoming spiritually mature.

DAY 3 What relationships can be observed between the next three desirable qualities? 2 Peter 1:6.

3

*Self-control.* The Greek word *egkrateia*, used four times in the New Testament (Acts 24:25; Gal. 5:23; and twice in today's verse), is consistently translated as "temperance" in the KJV. Most other versions rightly render it as "self-control," for it derives from *kratos*, "strength," and implies power over oneself, that is, self-control. This gives a wider application to Paul's ninth "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22, 23) and covers all areas of a Christian's life.

*Perseverance.* One of the most-expected of Christian virtues is "patience." Its practice is strongly recommended, especially in the New Testament where the Greek word occurs at least 28 times with the meaning of "endurance," or "continuance." The word suggests steadfastness, perseverance, constancy, as well as the ability to wait. These quiet qualities are needed in personal and public situations.

**SEARCH AND LEARN:** Compare the following texts in the King James Version with that of a more recent Bible version to see how "patience" has been translated:

Luke 8:15 \_\_\_\_\_

Rom. 15:4, 5 \_\_\_\_\_

2 Cor. 6:4 \_\_\_\_\_

*Godliness.* This also is a New Testament concept that the early Christian writers borrowed from pagan usage. The word is found only in 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and 2 Peter. It suggests reverence or piety, devotion to God, and has been defined as "very practical awareness of God in every aspect of life."—Michael Green, *Tyndale Commentaries*, 2 Peter and Jude (London: Tyndale Press, 1968), p. 70.

How greatly we need this quality today, both in our personal lives and in our church relationships! It can be fostered by simple devotional habits. Brother Lawrence, in his small but mighty devotional classic, describes this as "the practice of the presence of God." In his seventh letter he writes: "It is not necessary for being with God to be always at church; we may make an oratory of our heart wherein to retire from time to time, to converse with Him in meekness, humility, and love. . . . Use yourself then by degrees thus to worship Him, to get His grace, to offer Him your heart from time to time in the midst of your business, even every moment if you can."—*The Practice of the Presence of God* (Old Tappan, N. J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1958), p. 50.

DAY 4 Define the two final steps that complete the ladder of Christian growth. 2 Peter 1:7.

4



While Peter makes no apparent effort to rate one quality higher than another, we cannot escape the conviction that his thoughts are moving up the ladder of Christian excellence. Arrival at this seventh attribute (faith being the first and the key to the rest) suggests, as with Paul's classic list in 1 Corinthians 13, that the six preceding capacities avail little if they are not wrapped in love.

Pastor Peter encourages his Christian readers to cultivate and exercise *brotherly love*. In Scripture this term is used for affection shown to members of the same community (Rom. 12:10) and should be so used here. Happy is the church where brotherly and sisterly kindness reigns! Its balm soothes many wounds and dissolves many smoldering disagreements.

When we reach *charity or love* we are on the topmost rung of the ladder that reaches from earth to heaven; for, of all the noble traits that the apostle has been recommending, this is the highest. Without copying Paul, he is echoing Paul's thought: "the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13). How easy it is to repeat the musical phrase; how difficult to practice in every situation the principle it embodies! It refers to the queen of virtues; it denotes self-sacrificing concern and action on behalf of another. This love flows from God who Himself is love. (See 1 John 4:8.) Godly people who aspire to share in the divine nature must abound in such love to all about them.

**THINK IT THROUGH:** As you study, search your heart for evidence of genuine Christian love for others, be they church members or otherwise. If you find a lack in this area, it is time for you to heed Peter's counsel and to ask the Lord to add generous doses of brotherly kindness and Christ-like love to your store of Christian virtues.

**ILLUMINATION:** "These words are full of instruction, and strike the keynote of victory. The apostle presents before the believers the ladder of Christian progress, every step of which represents advancement in the knowledge of God, and in the climbing of which there is to be no standstill. . . . We are saved by climbing round after round, mounting step after step, to the height of Christ's ideal for us. . . .

"All these successive steps are not to be kept before the mind's eye, and counted as you start; but fixing the eye upon Jesus, with an eye single to the glory of God, you will make advancement. . . .

"By taking one step after another, the highest ascent may be climbed, and the summit of the mount may be reached at last."—*My Life Today*, p. 95.

"You are not to think that you must wait until you have perfected one grace before cultivating another. No; they are to grow up together, fed continually from the fountain of charity; every day that you live, you can be perfecting the blessed attributes fully revealed in the character of Christ."—Ellen G. White Comments, *S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 943.

**NOTES:**

DAY  
5

## II. BENEFITS FROM PROGRESS (2 Peter 1:8-11).

With what firm assurance does the apostle conclude his survey of ideal character development? 2 Peter 1:8.

Children often are told to do things without being given a reason. Wise parents and teachers realize that a child usually performs better when the need for and the benefits accruing from requests are explained. Our Lord has always known the value of such instruction and has often taken great care to include information with His commands. (For examples, see Ex. 20:8-12; Matt. 5:43-48; 16:24-27.)

Peter has just issued some stark injunctions bidding us to add one fine quality to another. He concludes that instruction by promising fruitage from compliance. If we cooperate with God by building into our characters the spiritual gifts that await our acceptance and use, then some very desirable results will follow. His use of the word *if* allows for the possibility that not all will follow his counsel, but we need not be among those who refuse. And, if we do not refuse, we can be sure that the Christian graces and the peace they bring will be "multiplied" in us (verse 2).

When we cooperate with God in cultivating our characters in the way that Peter has outlined, we reap benefits that are expressed negatively here: (1) We shall not be "barren," a word that is better rendered "idle" or "lazy"; and (2) we shall not be "without fruit." Both illustrations obviously are drawn from agriculture. The negative, of course, implies the positive. A personal and ever-increasing knowledge of Jesus certainly will produce fruit in our lives. What fruitage are we bearing?

How does the writer assess the usefulness of those who neglect to develop their Christian potential? Verse 9.

No Christian need be numbered among the unfruitful. But those who, having committed themselves to Christ by baptism, neglect to cultivate the graces listed in verses 5 to 7, are pictured as being "blind," or short-sighted. Failing to see the benefit and the glory promised to those who develop Christian attributes, they forget the commitment made and the joy experienced at the time of initial surrender to Jesus. They see only the temporal, having lost sight of the victory over sin that God's "exceeding great and precious promises" (verse 4) have made possible. They are in danger of qualifying for Peter's later comparison when he speaks of pigs who return to their own filth (2:22).

DAY  
6 What further fruitage is promised to those who persevere in Christian development? 2 Peter 1:10.

In view of the danger of backsliding and even of apostasy, there now comes earnest advice. This advice is addressed to "brethren" who have been earlier identified as "them that have obtained like precious faith

with us" (verse 1). These born-again Christians obviously include sisters also. Collectively, they are later called "beloved" (3:1, 8, 14, 17), an even more tender term. They are urged in 2 Peter 1:5 to give "diligence" or "to make every effort" (NIV), to make their "calling and election sure" (verse 10). This exhortation confirms that we have an active part to play in effecting our own salvation, not just a passive one as some suggest.

The calling comes from God who, as Peter avers, is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (3:9).

**NOTE:** This view is sustained throughout Scripture. (See Isa. 55:1; Eze. 18:23; 33:11; John 3:16; 7:37; 1 Tim. 2:4; Rev. 22:17.)

We are free to accept or reject the divine invitation. Those who accept are described as "the called" in Romans 8:28.

Peter urges us to make certain that we do not lose salvation by default. He exhorts us to do all that is necessary—to make sure for ourselves—that our calling and election are certain or confirmed. The counsel is followed by a promise. If we keep on doing those things—adding the graces listed in verses 5 to 7 and again referred to in verses 8 and 9, and ensuring that our calling and election are made certain—then we shall never fall away. The *never* is emphatic. The Jerusalem Bible translates the entire phrase as "there is no danger that you will ever fall away"—a stabilizing assurance!

**What assurance does Peter hold out to those who faithfully follow his inspired counsel? 2 Peter 1:11.**

If we "give diligence to make" our "calling and election sure," we shall find that generous arrangements have been made for us to enjoy eternal life. Some of the original words that lie behind that promise deserve closer attention. "For so," that is, "in this way" as outlined in verse 10 where we are urged to be diligent in making certain of our calling and election. "Entrance" (*eisodos*) is the reverse of *exodos*, and refers to the "way in" in contrast to an exodus, or way out. This suggests our exit from Egypt, or the world, and our admission into the Promised Land. Such a prospect will not be realized through our own efforts, but will be provided by Another's generosity, and that on a truly lavish scale. The word translated "abundantly" is related to the word for "wealth" or "riches." And what is the prospect? Entrance into "the everlasting kingdom" that will never pass away. (See Dan. 2:44; Rev. 11:15.) And whose is that kingdom? It belongs to the most powerful and most benevolent of all rulers—our own beloved Master and Saviour, Jesus.

**DAY 7 FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:** For a broadening of insight into the value of "Peter's Ladder" read *The Acts of the Apostles*, pages 529 to 533, and *The Great Controversy*, page 470.

Consider also the following:

"The apostle has presented before us the importance of making continual advancement in the Christian life. There is no excuse for our lack of

spiritual understanding. The successive steps in the path of progress are stated in the exhortation of the text, and we must take these steps if we fulfill the requirement of God, and become fitted for the heavenly courts. The work of progress is not left wholly dependent on our weak human efforts; but as we endeavor to walk in the footsteps of the Redeemer, divine strength will be imparted, that the righteousness of the law may be fulfilled in us. Help has been laid upon One who is mighty to save, and as we strive to add these virtues, He will multiply grace, according to our need, from His own divine sufficiency.”—Ellen G. White, *Peter's Counsel to Parents*, p. 16.

“No one will make any upward progress without persevering effort. He who would overcome must hold fast to Christ. He must not look back, but keep the eye ever upward, gaining one grace after another.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 147.

“Seize every opportunity to contribute to the happiness of those around you, sharing with them your affection. Words of kindness, looks of sympathy, expressions of appreciation, would to many a struggling, lonely one be as a cup of cold water to a thirsty soul. A word of cheer, an act of kindness, would go far to lighten the burdens that are resting heavily upon weary shoulders. It is in unselfish ministry that true happiness is found.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 7, p. 50.

“Our love is frequently selfish, for we confine it to prescribed limits. When we come into close union and fellowship with Christ, our love and sympathy and our works of benevolence will reach down deeper and will widen and strengthen with exercise. The love and interest of Christ's followers must be as broad as the world. Those who live merely for ‘me and mine’ will fail of Heaven.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 530.

**SUMMARY:** The act of beginning the joyful Christian pilgrimage is a useful one, but it has little value unless it is followed by forward motion toward the kingdom. This is marked by spiritual growth, the development of character traits that play a vital part in fitting us for a sin-free eternity.

#### APPLICATION:

- As a Christian, I need to grow. There is no danger of my becoming too tall! The sky is the limit. I need *continual* spiritual growth.
- Which of the eight qualities listed in 2 Peter 1:5-7 are strong features in my character? Which are weakest? What attention am I going to give to the latter as a result of this week's study?
- My growth should result from my increasing personal knowledge of and living acquaintance with the Lord of my life.
- Such growth will not take place without deliberate and continuous effort on my part. I must be diligent, adding my diligence to what God and Christ have already done and continue to do for me.
- As a Christian I need to be fruitful. My personal growth should also benefit others.

# The Ministry of Remembrance

**THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** 2 Peter 1:12-15.

**DAY 1** **MEMORY TEXT:** "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26).

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** The pastor-spirit in Peter made him urge his friends to recall the instruction and experiences that led them to become Christians. Anticipation of his own martyrdom lent urgency to his exhortations. This reminds us of our need to remember the teachings that drew us to Christ and into His church.

OVERVIEW—2 Peter 1:12-15	
Verse 12	The apostle recognizes that his readers are knowledgeable concerning the principal tenets of their faith, but sees the need to refresh their memories.
Verse 13	He intends to keep on reminding them of that need while his life is spared.
Verse 14	Peter realizes that Christ's prophecy concerning his death will soon be fulfilled.
Verse 15	His fervent desire is that they will remain faithful after his death.

**INTRODUCTION:** Memory is an essential function for living. Without it physical life might continue with other people's aid, but meaningful life would be impossible. Memory enables us to perform needful acts, to learn life's lessons, to profit from its joys and sorrows, its successes and failures, from instruction and from experience—indeed, experience is based on memory. The ability to remember enables us to love and be loved, for without it we would start each day with totally new encounters, never associating our parents, our children, our wives, our husbands, or our friends with those who brought joy and support to us yesterday. Without memory there would be no music, no poetry, no art of any kind. There

would be no past on which to build present and future achievements. Our only choice would be to live in an empty present.

Without memory we would have no religion, for religion is founded on the past, serves the present, and prepares for the future. Thus it demands that we remember. Memory has played a central role in bringing us the Bible. The book of Genesis, for instance, enshrines many patriarchal recollections; while the remainder of the Old Testament, including the major and minor prophets, is firmly based on the function of memory in the minds of those whom the Spirit chose to serve as writers. In the New Testament, Luke discloses his dependence on others' accounts of what they had known and heard (Luke 1:1-4), while John, aided by the Spirit, depended on memory for the composition of his Gospel and the accurate reporting of his apocalyptic visions.

In this setting it should not surprise us that, in the passage we are studying this week, Peter declares his intention of stirring up his readers' memories of the history on which their faith is based. His own remembrances were clear and abundant, from the day Jesus called him into partnership (Matt. 4:18-20) to the hour when his Master was taken up into heaven and the Spirit came to lead the infant church into action. This same Spirit is ever needed by Christ's followers. As this week's memory text indicates, He is to teach us all things. He is to bring all things to our remembrance, and especially to help us recall the instructions of our Lord. It is against this background of things past that we now turn to study, for our present profit, the passage in which Peter underlines our need to remember.

#### DAY I. FAITHFUL TEACHER (2 Peter 1:12).

**2**

*Pastoral concern.* Although the greeting at the beginning of this epistle tells us the name of the writer, it gives no clue to the identity of its recipients apart from confirming that they were fellow Christians. Because his letter reveals a personal knowledge of his readers' needs and a deep concern for their spiritual welfare, some think that it is not difficult to accept the thought that Peter was at one time their pastor. Be that as it may, for him they are not "out of sight, out of mind." From afar he is with them, conscious of the situations that confront them and giving the counsel that is most suitable to their circumstances.

It seems likely that the apostle expresses his instructions positively rather than in the negative form given in some versions of this passage. Far from being in any way negligent, he always intends to keep on reminding them of the importance of those matters that he has been discussing with them. The first word, "Wherefore," may primarily refer back to verse 11 with its prospect of their entrance into Christ's eternal kingdom. But "these things" must include the moral qualities promoted in verses 5 to 8 the diligence that will aid their "calling and election" (verse 10), and the certainty of their salvation (verse 11).

**What does Peter's example teach us about helping others learn and keep in mind the truths of the gospel message?**

As a good teacher, Peter reviews the divine plan, refreshing his readers' memories, fixing the essentials in their minds so that they will not fail through forgetfulness. It is as if he were saying, "We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 31. He doubtless gave them similar instruction when he was with them; but, knowing human frailty, he now commits it to writing that they might have it for repeated reference.

**In addition to Peter's instruction, on what other assistance may we depend for recalling redemptive teaching? John 14:26.**

This is a promise from Christ's own lips, given primarily to His first disciples; but it also is applicable to all who follow Him. We are to store divine instruction in the almost limitless capacities of our minds. Students of the human brain tell us that the average person uses less than 10 percent of his or her mental capacity. There is plenty of room, then, for the storage of all the spiritual instruction that we are willing to receive, and we can build a well-nigh inexhaustible reserve for present and future use under the prompting and guidance of the Holy Spirit. First, we must learn ("he shall teach you all things"); then, on an ongoing basis, we must remember ("he shall bring all things to your remembrance"). In this respect, the Spirit's mission is to remind us of Christ's teachings ("whatsoever I have said unto you").

**SEARCH AND LEARN: What were some of the memories that awaited Peter's recall?**

Matt. 14:28-31 \_\_\_\_\_

Mark 1:29-31 \_\_\_\_\_

John 1:41, 42 \_\_\_\_\_

John 13:8, 9 \_\_\_\_\_

John 20:3-7 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 12:3-19 \_\_\_\_\_

There is so much detail that we long to know, and that Peter could accurately give! But we must settle for what has been given. We would like to know more, but let us be honest. Have we exhausted all the information that is currently at our disposal in the Gospels and Epistles?

Our minds may be likened to a bank wherein we deposit the records of life's experiences and the lessons that they have taught us. In addition there is the spiritual information and understanding that come from years of study and learning. We are free to withdraw those recollections at any time, to use them for guidance and inspiration. We can then return them to the bank without incurring any penalty or loss, and even with some

gain. The more we draw upon those deposits the greater our wealth becomes—with one condition: we must continually make new deposits in order to avoid total dependence on the past. An active and current account shows that we still are in business.

**DAY 3** Why does Peter underline the continuing need for the study of Christian fundamentals even by mature believers? 2 Peter 1:12.

The writer displays great tact. It is as if he were aware of a more recently discovered fact, namely, that all we hear, read, or experience is never lost; it is stored away in our minds, available for recall. The trouble with most of us is that we are not able to recall every desired piece of information when it is most needed. So the apostle recognizes that his readers know “these things” of which he has been writing, but he recognizes in addition that their memories need to be strengthened.

He could be, and is, writing to each of us in the late twentieth century. Very few of us can claim ignorance of the facts of our religion. We know the “fundamental truths.” Many of us can quote book, chapter, and verse in their support. Others feel doctrinally secure but are worried by fightings and fears within and without. Others harbor doubts that unsettle their faith. Because of problems such as these, Peter sees the need for reminding all of us to refresh our remembrance and understanding of the foundations of our belief and conduct. It is not that these pillars change, but that our grasp and application of them should develop as we mature in the practice of our religion.

**What is the significance of the phrase “present truth” in verse 12?**

From the Day of Pentecost there had been a recognizable body of doctrine. The word *present* therefore alludes to the knowledge of religious truth that Peter’s readers then possessed in common with other believers. They had been well instructed, yet they still needed to have their knowledge refreshed and enlarged. Do we not stand in similar need? “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).

**DAY 4** II. FAITHFUL SHEPHERD (2 Peter 1:13).

*Conscientious pastor.* As it was with Paul—“Christ’s love compels us” (2 Cor. 5:14, NIV)—so with Peter: love for his flock inspired his untiring ministry. “I think it meet,” or “right” (NIV), he explains, using the Greek word that is related to the word for “righteousness,” and which in New Testament usage can carry high moral overtones. His pastoral conscience impels him to remind them of the foundations of their faith. He repeatedly draws their attention to the historical and moral bases on which their religion rests. His first efforts may not have seemed entirely successful, for he intends to keep on stirring up their sluggish memories, or to keep on waking them up to what they have been taught. Such reminders are a vital part of a pastor’s ministry. His congregation’s willing response, expressed in renewed belief and active loyalty, is a large part of that pastor’s reward.



**THINK IT THROUGH: Why should Christians exercise their memories?**

No effort that we make to remember what we have been taught will be lost. "It is a law of the mind, that it will narrow or expand to the dimensions of the things with which it becomes familiar. The mental powers will surely become contracted, and will lose their ability to grasp the deep meanings of the word of God, unless they are put vigorously and persistently to the task of searching for truth. The mind will enlarge, if it is employed in tracing out the relation of the subjects of the Bible, comparing scripture with scripture, and spiritual things with spiritual. Go below the surface; the richest treasures of thought are waiting for the skillful and diligent student."—*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 127.

**DAY III. FAITHFUL MARTYR (2 Peter 1:14, 15).****5**

*Death draws near.* The phrase "as long as I am in this tabernacle" (verse 13) introduces the topic of mortality. In Peter's case he was well instructed on the subject. Although he did not know the date of his death, he knew he was drawing near to that dread event. For more than 30 years he had carried with him the memory of his Master's postresurrection disclosure, spoken beside the Tiberian Sea: "When thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." He knew what those words meant: "This spake he [Jesus], signifying by what death he [Peter] should glorify God" (John 21:18, 19). (See also John 13:36.) And now, as in all probability he neared the age of 70 and the fulfillment of those solemn phrases came uncomfortably close, he viewed his coming death by crucifixion calmly, uncomplainingly: "I know," that is, he recognizes, "that I shall have to leave this body at very short notice" (2 Peter 1:14, Phillips). Although there is no firm clue as to its place of origin, if the letter were written from prison during Nero's persecution of Christians, it would have been sent from Rome. Yet there is no self-pity in the apostle's attitude. His thoughts are fastened not on his own welfare but on that of his distant Christian friends.

The word Peter uses for *tabernacle* is not the usual New Testament term used to designate such a place. The reference is to the body in which he lives as in a tent. "Peter is thinking of his mortal, material body as but a temporary thing eventually to be replaced by an immortal one."—*S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 599. This immediately raises the question: If he lays aside his body, what happens to the rest of his being? Believers in the immortality of the soul speak of the departure of that entity to eternal bliss. We who find such a concept unscriptural, tie this reference to the Bible teaching of an unbroken sleep that will continue until the second coming at which time "this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:53). In support of that position, note that Peter makes no reference to any heavenward sequel to the body's decease. He would, however, agree that "the spirit [or breath] shall return unto God who gave it" (Eccl. 12:7).

The word translated "shortly" in the King James Version (verse 14) may be better expressed as "swiftly" or "speedily," thereby strengthen-

ing the probability that he expected to die soon after writing his letter. If that was so, how precious that letter would be to contemporary Christians in Asia Minor, and eventually to believers in all ages!

**DAY 6** In the face of death, how does Peter reveal his deep concern for his readers' spiritual welfare? 2 Peter 1:15.

The sense of urgency again shows itself in the apostle's message. The words "I will endeavour" may be translated, "I shall make haste," or "I shall speak earnestly," suggesting the seriousness of what he is about to say. This note is deepened by his speaking of his "decease," a reference to his impending death. In writing this, he employs the word *exodos* which, as mentioned in the last lesson, literally means "a way out." The most famous use of the word is for the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt. In this verse it evidently is used to depict Peter's departure from this life by crucifixion. *Exodos* is also used by Luke in recording the transfiguration scene where Moses and Elijah talk with Jesus concerning His "decease" or death at Jerusalem (Luke 9:31). If Peter had expected immediate translation to heaven at the time of his death, he might well have used the well-known Greek word *eisodos*, that is, "a way into" or "an entry," suggesting entrance into heaven. His choice of *exodos* suggests that he was not expecting immediate entrance into glory, but viewed death as his exodus from this life with no thought of an immediate entry into a promised land.

Without spending further words on his own imminent departure or death, Peter concentrates on his friends' well-being. To that end he writes his epistle with its frequent urgent emphases on "remembrance."

**NOTE** that Peter already has made several references to the sources that are available for Christian development: verse 3—divinely given knowledge of the Lord Jesus, verse 4—"great and precious promises," verses 5-8—moral graces that yield spiritual fruitage, verses 9-11—graces that will direct their steps toward the kingdom.

In urging them to remember, it is possible also that Peter may have been referring to that body of instruction that Mark embodied in his Gospel, which usually is attributed to information he received from Peter. Beginning with verse 12 he repeatedly stresses the need for them to remember what they have been taught, and now, in verse 15, he sets that counsel in the context of his own approaching execution. The exhortations are a moving part of his last will and testament, and must have been most lovingly treasured and circulated.

**DAY 7** **FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:** Read with sympathetic attention, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pages 537, 538 that deal with Peter's death.

Study the following quotations carefully:

"Peter can hardly over-emphasize the importance of reminders. Here (2 Peter 1:13) he has just reminded his readers of the call of God, the need for growth in grace, and the heavenly home which awaits them. . . . It would seem that he could never forget His Lord's commission, 'When

you are converted, establish your brethren.' He determines to continue with it to the end of his days."—Michael Green, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, vol. 18, p. 78.

"As a means of intellectual training, the Bible is more effective than any other book, or all other books combined. The greatness of its themes, the dignified simplicity of its utterances, the beauty of its imagery, quicken and uplift the thoughts as nothing else can. No other study can impart such mental power as does the effort to grasp the stupendous truths of revelation. The mind thus brought in contact with the thoughts of the Infinite cannot but expand and strengthen."—*Education*. p. 124.

**SUMMARY:** Ministerial faithfulness requires that pastors remind their congregations of the principal convictions that led them to become Christians. On their side, all Christians need to review the foundations of their faith and to invite the Holy Spirit's ministry of remembrance. Our memories are frail, and we need frequent refreshment of the hope that is within us.

**APPLICATION:**

- How often do I allow the Holy Spirit to teach me all things? Only on Sabbaths? Why should I not seek His instruction every day?
- A thought for pastors and teachers: How faithful am I in reminding the members of my congregation or my class about the foundations on which their Christian faith must stand?
- As a baptized member, how faithful am I in reviewing and strengthening my understanding of the basic teachings that led me to become a Seventh-day Adventist?
- How diligent am I in Bible study? Do I merely read, or do I meditate upon and study the inspired words? Do I grow in understanding through sharing what I learn with those about me?
- Am I as ready to face normal death as was Peter to face the horror of crucifixion?

**NOTES:**

# Eyewitness of Majesty

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 2 Peter 1:16-18.

**DAY** MEMORY TEXT: "After six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and **1** John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light" (Matt. 17:1, 2).

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** The certainty of our faith is founded on the incarnation of our Lord as Jesus of Nazareth. The transfiguration dramatized that saving act and the coming of the future kingdom of glory. Even when we study it today it focuses our attention on our Saviour's majesty and His power over sin and death.

OVERVIEW—2 Peter 1:16-18	
Verse 16a	In telling the believers about the future kingdom of glory Peter insists that he did not follow "cunningly devised fables."
Verse 16b	He was an eyewitness of the transfiguration—a miniature representation of Christ's coming kingdom.
Verse 17	Peter's brief report of the transfiguration.
Verse 18	He saw it, heard the voice, and never would be able to forget it.

**INTRODUCTION:** The apostle's readers lived in an idolatrous environment. Those who had the courage to become Christians in the first century had to contend with the multitude of gods who were worshiped, in varying degrees of sincerity and faithfulness, by most of their neighbors. There was no way of escaping from the idol-ridden environment. Gateways to every town and village were flanked by statues representing their inhabitants' gods and goddesses. Public buildings were adorned by busts of the same. Private homes had their niches where family deities were housed. Even in the country, escape was impossible, for there the sacred groves and grottoes, dedicated to the worship of one or more of the vast pantheon, were held in no less esteem than the cities' temples.

In such surroundings, the Christian was pledged to worship the invisible God who once had manifested Himself in the person of His Son. Jesus, born as a Jew, taught the highest of all moralities and called His

followers to its faithful observance. His religion was so different from all others that its adherents were marked men and women who needed incalculable courage to be faithful to their newfound beliefs.

Peter wrote his two letters in order to strengthen such stalwarts in their brave witness. In his second letter we have found him urging his fellow Christians to develop their spiritual potential (1:2), to grow in godliness (1:3, 4), diligently to add grace to grace (1:5-7), and to prepare for entrance into Christ's kingdom (1:10). He recognized their continuing need of encouragement and instruction, and took care to remind them to be faithful to the rudiments of their religion (1:10-15).

In verses 16 to 18 he practiced what he had been preaching about remembering. He recalled, as vividly as if it had happened only a short while before, the splendor of his Master's transfiguration. Never, never would he forget that holy drama. He knew that sharing it would bring them strength and confidence for faithful witness in the pagan world in which they lived.

#### DAY I. FABLE OR FACT? (2 Peter 1:16).

## 2

*Cunningly devised fables.* The early Christians lived in a world whose major religions were formulated around fables and folklore that were fashioned to explain many of life's principal mysteries. Many such stories were embodied in Greek and Roman legends that were cast in poetical form. The mythical gods and goddesses of these legends assumed human guise, as artists represented them in exquisite sculptures. One firm exception to this general trend was Judaism with its monotheism—"The Lord our God is one Lord"—yet even that was diluted by fantastic angelology and demonology and other nonbiblical concepts before the Christian era began.

Into this fancy-laden atmosphere there came the reality of Bethlehem's Babe, the silent but busy years at Nazareth, the recognition through John's baptism, the early preaching beside the Sea of Galilee, the quietly performed miracles, and Christ's acceptance and rejection in Jerusalem. A few perceptive eyes penetrated the humanity that veiled Christ's divinity; but, for the most part, the Son of God was concealed by the Son of man. On one unique occasion the veil was lifted and heavenly splendor was allowed to shine through. That was on the mount where the Son of Mary stood revealed as the Son of God.

Peter must have had all this in mind as he turned from his exhortations on remembering to appeal to the history in which he had participated.

**What were the "cunningly devised fables," or "cleverly devised myths" (RSV), or "cleverly invented stories" (NIV), or "tales artfully spun" (NEB) that Peter rejected?**

He might have been referring to the heathen mythology mentioned above, knowing that in Asia Minor his readers were daily exposed to such officially supported fiction. Or he may have been thinking of the fanciful distortions of Christian doctrine that were being peddled by false teachers such as those with whom we will find him dealing so energetically in chapter 2 of this epistle.

How does the apostle relate the revelation of Christ's glory to His final triumph? 2 Peter 1:16.

*Our Lord's coming.* Against the perverted notions being circulated Peter here appeals to either (1) his preaching of the gospel story, or (2) his account of Christ's life and ministry that came to be embodied in Mark's Gospel. These two possible applications are based on the words "we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." It should also be noted that Peter was not speaking solely on his own authority. He employs the apostolic "we" in this verse, undoubtedly bringing James and John into the picture as they saw and heard what he saw and heard on "the holy mount."

Peter's words sustain a wider application still; for he uses the key New Testament word *parousia*, "coming" or "presence," which in 17 of its 22 occurrences refers to Christ's second coming.

**DAY** NOTE how the second coming consistently is linked with a manifestation of "power" in Matthew 24:27-30; 1 Corinthians 15:53-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; 2 Peter 3:10-13.

It seems clear that, in addition to the fleeting magnificence of the transfiguration, Peter also had his Lord's return (which it prefigured) in mind. That interpretation is supported by the close connection between the transfiguration and the second coming in the Gospel records. Matthew's account may be taken as typical, with Mark and Luke agreeing. In Matthew 16 Jesus concluded His discourse concerning His divinity (verses 13-20), His death and resurrection (verses 21-23), and the superior worth of the soul over the world (verses 24-26) with an unmistakable reference to His climactic return (verse 27). He followed this with the promise in verse 28: "There be some of you standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." Chapter 17 then describes the transfiguration (verses 1-9), implying that, in miniature, it prefigures Christ's return in glory. It might be described as a preview of His second coming.

What impressive claim does Peter make concerning his presence on the mount of transfiguration? 2 Peter 1:16, last part.

Each word in the clause "but were eyewitnesses of his majesty" is significant. The "but" relates to the writer's assertion that gospel messengers were not following myths or fables as they taught about Christ's power and His return. On the contrary, they were relating what they had actually seen. They were "eyewitnesses," a word translated from a Greek word that is used only here in the New Testament, but ordinarily applied to those who had been initiated into the higher mysteries as practiced in pagan religions. By using that particular word, Peter asserts the superiority of his witness over that of those who promoted "cunningly

devised fables." He, with James and John, had been privileged beyond all comparison over other teachers. With his own eyes he had looked on the glorified Jesus. He had seen his Master in His regal majesty—a revelation that soared higher than any human initiation could ever reach. He and his two companions had seen the King in His beauty (Isa. 33:17).

**DAY 4** II. DIVINE REALITY (2 Peter 1:17).

**4**

*Honor from heaven.* The apostle now describes some aspects of the unique scene of which he was an eyewitness. He makes no effort to tell the entire story for which even the concise Mark uses nine verses (Mark 9:2-10). He concentrates on those features that serve his immediate purpose—to stress the reliability of the Christian message in contrast to the unreliability of rival philosophies or of unorthodox Christian teachings. To this end he recalls the honor and glory that came to his Master on the mount: the honor and the glory which He had temporarily set aside but which He had possessed with God “before the world was” (John 17:5). In complete humility, the Son had left those attributes in His Father’s hands, and from those hands again received them for a brief time prior to taking them again forever.

“*There came such a voice to him from [or by] the excellent glory.*” We do not know the form in which the Father and the Son communed with each other during our Lord’s earthly life. But publicly audible exchanges appear to have been few: once at baptism (Matt. 3:17), again at the transfiguration (Matt. 17:5), and once more soon after Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem (John 12:28). How precious those acknowledgements must have been to the Son of man in His voluntary exile from His Father’s home!

**ILLUSTRATION:** To what may we in our restricted humanity compare the encouraging joy that such a pronouncement brought to the earth-bound Son? By way of faint comparison, imagine a young man on an antarctic expedition, marooned at the South Pole but in radio communication with his faraway home, tuning in to hear his father’s voice just as clearly as if he were beside him, giving the assurance that all was well, help was on the way, and that he would soon be home! Loneliness would vanish. The two would be close together again, and the wait would be endured with quiet confidence.

**What was the significance of the awesome acknowledgement that the disciples heard upon the holy mount? 2 Peter 1:17, 18.**

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*Divine recognition.* Apart from the majestic manifestation of the Father’s glory that must have filled the disciples’ hearts with holy awe, there came “a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” (Matt. 17:5). They had heard the voice from heaven at Jesus’ baptism, but so had the multitude that crowded Jordan’s bank. They later were to be in Jerusalem when once

again there came "a voice from heaven" (John 12:28). However, the occasion on the mount was different. They were far from the crowds, three frail men upon a mountain with three who rank among history's greatest spiritual leaders—Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. To say it was unique is a trite understatement; it must be declared one of the supreme moments in universal history. It struck the note of triumph that was needed in the shadow of the cross. It revealed that the Almighty was and is in control. Peter and his companions saw and heard the resurrected Moses and the translated Elijah talk with Jesus about His sacrifice while looking ahead to His victory (Luke 9:31). Then there came the Father's voice acknowledging His beloved Son. What assurance that recognition must have brought to the disciples' hearts!

### DAY III. APOSTOLIC ASSURANCE (2 Peter 1:18).

**5**

*Confident witness.* We do not know how long the transfiguration scene lasted, but it came at night while Jesus was immersed in prayer. Luke tells us that "Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep," so they would have been unconscious of the passage of time. But on waking "they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him" (Luke 9:32). (See also *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 420, 421.) That splendor they could never forget. In addition, there was the voice, a voice from another realm, reverberating over the mountaintop. It rang in their ears after the figures of Moses and Elijah had disappeared. Its celestial tones remained with them decades after they had gone down to the plain.

How does an eyewitness set about convincing others of the reality of his unique experience? In Peter's case, two other trustworthy witnesses, James and John, had participated in the remarkable scene. Although James had been martyred and Peter and John were not often together after Pentecost, Peter could at any time call upon John to corroborate his account. He was therefore able to declare, "This voice which came from heaven we heard." If John had been separately cross-examined, he would have told the same story. This certainty allowed Peter to make his claim still more emphatic: "We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain" (2 Peter 1:18, NIV).

The link between the earthly and the heavenly, between the mountain under their feet and the unearthly splendor surrounding the three dazzling figures, was the divine-human Jesus. The disciples were "with him," with the One whom they knew and loved, although they often had been puzzled as to His identity. A short while before the transfiguration Peter had confessed, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). And now, here was resplendent proof that the insight he had been given was correct.

**What misunderstanding was evident in Peter's response at the time of the transfiguration? Matt. 17:4.**



"The disciples are confident that Moses and Elijah have been sent to protect their Master, and to establish His authority as king.

"But before the crown must come the cross. Not the inauguration of Christ as king, but the decease to be accomplished at Jerusalem, is the subject of their conference with Jesus."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 422.

While two celestial citizens, Moses and Elijah, talked with the God-man, Jesus, three mortals served as observers. This the mortals could do because Jesus belonged to both heaven and earth. When the scene faded, He would be peculiarly theirs again; then, after another six months or so, a cloud would receive Him out of their sight and He would return to His eternal Habitat—to that heavenly country where Moses and Elijah were then living. During those intervening months, the trio must often have recalled the revelation that had been granted them. When at last "a cloud received him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9) they remained nearer to Him because of the glimpse of His glory that had been granted them.

**DAY REACT:** Why are not more believers given the same kind of witness that the three disciples received at the transfiguration? What contribution to understanding the answer can you gain from Paul's comparison in 2 Corinthians 4:18 of the unseen against the visible?

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*Our need of the awe-inspiring.* Every Christian needs the confidence that can be gained from such other-worldly phenomena as Peter and his companions experienced while on the mountaintop. We may not obtain it with the dramatic directness that came to the privileged trio, but such experiences should become so real through study and personal knowledge of their actuality that we make them truly our own.

Scripture is rich in suggestion about such needs and how they may be satisfied. In a most reassuring manner such experiences center on the Person of Christ, but they derive from the Trinity and involve God the Father and God the Spirit as well as God the Son. Examples are most easily identified by scriptures that deal with particular and essential happenings in the life of a Christian. The new birth is typical. Its essence is stated by the Saviour Himself: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). No physical act indicates the beginning of such a spiritual new life. The miracle is internal, operating on the level of the spirit and not on the body. Yet, "except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). Mary looked back to her awe-inspiring encounter with Gabriel and ever remembered the words that changed her entire relation to life: "Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt . . . bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus" (Luke 1:30, 31).

True religion, far from rejecting such possibilities of the supernatural, accepts and welcomes their proper manifestation.

**THINK IT THROUGH:** Applying these convictions to our present-day lives, we become aware of our own need for contact with Divinity. Each of us needs his or her own individual miracle of grace. Its nature and time

and place of occurrence are not the principal issues. It is more important to know for a certainty that we have met with God and have become intensely aware of His holiness, His power, His love, His call, and His personal interest in our welfare. The consciousness of having been in contact with God personally is of inestimable value to us.

Moses had a thrilling personal contact with God as he drew near the burning bush (Ex. 3:1-6) and, to an even greater degree as he met the Lord in the tabernacle or on Sinai (Ex. 33:11; Deut. 34:10). Isaiah "saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up," and could declare, "Mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isa. 6:1, 5). Daniel had his vision of "the Ancient of days" (Dan. 7:9, 10). When Saul of Tarsus journeyed from Jerusalem to Damascus, "suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven" (Acts 9:3). Most of us do not experience such supernatural manifestations. It is much more common for God to speak to us through the "still small voice." But all of us should develop a sense of being in contact with God.

**DAY 7 FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:** Compare the transfiguration accounts as given by Matthew (16:28 to 17:9), Mark (9:1-10), and Luke (9:27-36) and consider the purpose that lay behind Peter's reference to that event (2 Peter 1:16-18). Note that this is the only specific reference to the transfiguration apart from the Gospel accounts.

For insights, information, and comment, read *The Desire of Ages*, pages 419 to 425; *S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, volume 5, pages 437 to 440; volume 7, pages 600, 601.

Refresh your mind concerning Moses' death and resurrection (Deut. 34:1-6 and Jude 9), and Elijah's translation (2 Kings 2:1-11).

**SUMMARY:** Many years had passed since the transfiguration, but Peter could not forget that vivid and dramatic experience. Although we should not necessarily expect spectacular manifestations such as the one Peter saw, we each need our own personal sense of contact with or word from the Lord of hosts. Our eyes need to see "the king in his beauty" and to "behold the land that is very far off" (Isa. 33:17).

#### APPLICATION:

- What personal inspiration have I gained from this fresh look at Christ's majesty? How does it compare with that which Peter reports?
- To what extent does materialism mold my life, to the exclusion of true spirituality?
- What have been the most intense spiritual experiences in my Christian life? What blessings shall I gain by preserving my memory of them? In addition to recollections of conversion, baptism, marriage, election to church office, what other milestones in my spiritual career and Christian development are worthy of recall?
- On what should my faith be based—supernatural experiences, Scripture, or my personal friendship with Christ?
- Can those about me tell that I have had a personal experience with the Lord?

# The Voice of Prophecy

**THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 2 Peter 1:19-21.**

**DAY 1** **MEMORY TEXT:** "The prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21).

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** Although we have not been eyewitnesses of Christ's majesty, the Word of God and, in particular, its prophetic passages can bring us a similar revelation along with inspiration and conviction. Therefore we ought to study that Word diligently.

## OVERVIEW—2 Peter 1:19-21

Verse 19	Until the second coming we have God's revelation given through the prophetic word as a sure means of guidance and authority.
Verses 20, 21	This revelation was not the product of human minds but came from and only can be understood fully through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

**INTRODUCTION:** As we ourselves study the Scriptures, it is well to discover and remember to whom they were written, the purpose behind their composition, and the circumstances under which they were composed. It is not always easy to satisfy those requirements, but we should do our best to meet them. In our present study we are accepting the probability that Peter's second message is addressed to those who received his first epistle. We do well, then, to become acquainted with what life was like for those early Christians in Asia Minor and to remember the setting in which they practiced their newfound religion. Some of them may have been expatriate Jews who were spread throughout the Mediterranean world and the Middle East by what is known as the Diaspora or dispersion. These people would be acquainted with those Scriptures that we call the Old Testament. They would also face the subtle and insistent danger of being influenced by the pagan philosophies that swirled around them and would need constant recourse to the central teachings of their Christian faith.

Other members of the scattered congregations had come out of paganism and had many superstitions to overcome and much morality to learn. However, they had become acquainted with the law and the prophets and, accepting them as the word of God, had built their Christian faith on the foundations of those Scriptures. Recognizing these varied needs,

Peter shared with both groups the revelation of his Master's glory as he saw it revealed on "the holy mount," and directed them to the additional and wider inspiration that comes from "prophecy of the scripture."

*Peter's experience.* At this juncture we might well pause to review the miracle of the apostle's own development. He came from Bethsaida, a fishing village on the northeastern shore of Lake Galilee. As was natural, he became a fisherman, and probably had little formal education. Although Galilee was not noted for its religious fervor, Peter and his fellows must have benefited from synagogue instruction to such an extent that when his brother Andrew announced, "We have found the Messiah" (John 1:41), Peter believed and followed the Man from Nazareth.

At that stage his theology was limited, but association with the Master Teacher widened and deepened his understanding of true religion. By the time of Pentecost, and equipped by the Holy Spirit, he was able to draw enough on what he had learned to be able to fill the role of chief spokesman for the infant church. About 35 years later his pastoral and apostolic experience gave him still wider knowledge of Scripture and profound insights into its teachings. Today we benefit from his spiritual gifts.

DAY I. HEED THE PROPHETIC LIGHT (2 Peter 1:19).

2

How is the transfiguration linked to the certainty of Bible prophecy? 2 Peter 1:18, 19.

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*"We have also a more sure word of prophecy."* We should resist the temptation to see in these words a pitting of prophecy against the transfiguration scene. The original wording may not warrant such an interpretation. It can be understood to say, "We have the prophetic word [made] more sure," that is, the mountaintop revelation of the Master's divinity confirmed all that the prophets had foretold concerning the Redeemer. There could be no higher revelation than that—it was an unveiling of the Son's eternal glory, which was His before time began. The disciples' glimpse of that majesty made every detail of related Old Testament prophecy vividly significant. Not only could they say, "This voice . . . we heard"; they could just as emphatically declare, "This glory we saw."

*"Whereunto ye do well that ye take heed."* This unforgettable experience increased the disciples' appreciation for Bible prophecy and prompted them to recommend it to their converts who could not expect to have such an experience. Peter tells his friends: You will do well to give earnest attention to the prophetic word. He explained his reason for that counsel, basing it on prophecy's ability to throw beams of light into dark murky places.

**COMPARE** with Deuteronomy 8:3; Amos 3:7; Matthew 22:29; and John 7:17.

*"As unto a light that shineth in a dark place."* The lamps of those days

were small clay vessels holding oil that fed a lighted wick. The shining refers to the bringing of light to dispel darkness. The dark or dusty, needy place probably refers to the pagan world in which the believers lived, but it also may refer to the unknown track we all have to tread. The lamp sheds sufficient light to show the traveler the right path to take. As the psalmist said, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Ps. 119:105). In either case, true prophecy, contained in the Word of God, in both the Old and New Testaments, does throw valuable light on the present and on the unexplored road that lies before each one of us. The Lord has given the light of prophecy to show us the right road, to illumine its dangers and its delights, and to guide us safely to our destination—that far country where we shall have no need of the light of the sun, for the "Lord God giveth them light" (Rev. 22:5). No wonder the apostle recommends that his flock give thorough study to Bible prophecy. Its issues concern eternity and the Christian's relation to it.

DAY  
3

For how long and why will prophecy be needed? Verse 19.

In its final clauses verse 19 makes it clear that the beneficent ministry of prophecy will be needed until the end, either the end of the individual life, or the end of human history. The wording, while capable of more than one interpretation, does refer to a future event and does focus on individual involvement in that event. It speaks of a time during which prophecy will function—"until the day dawn." The word used for "dawn" can be more literally translated as "shine through," and refers to the time when light shines through darkness as it does at the dawn of each new day. The following phrase throws a light on the significance of the previous phrase by adding to the definition, saying, "and a day star arise in your hearts." The only New Testament use of the term *day star* is that found in this verse, but other passages such as Luke 1:78 ("dayspring"), Revelation 2:28 ("morning star") and Revelation 22:16 ("bright and morning star") support the interpretation that *day star* refers to Christ.

What a beautiful way of depicting the illumination that flooded the minds of those who accepted Jesus as the Light of their world! Their new-found religion rose far above the best morality that paganism could offer and flooded their souls with brilliant spiritual light.

What does Peter refer to in his use of the expression "until the day dawn"?

He refers to the second coming of Christ as the climax to which most prophecies point. After the second coming God's people will not need the Scriptures, for they will talk to Him face to face.

The New Testament reveals that the early Christians expected their Lord's soon return. This was a natural and commendable hope, based on their understanding of Christ's own promises and the apostles' early expectations. In this sense, the "day star" of hope concerning Christ's return arose in their hearts and encouraged them in the Christian way. The passage of time later led them to see that the second advent might lie

farther in the future than either they or their teachers had first expected. (See *S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 728-730 for more detailed comment on the deferred hope.)

DAY  
4

## II. A PRINCIPLE OF INTERPRETATION (2 Peter 1:20).

*Warning of a Danger Involved.* Mention of prophecy (verse 19) leads the writer to warn his readers against an ever-present danger in respect to prophecy. His warning is emphatic: "Knowing this first," that is, "keep this principle in the forefront of your thinking" as you seek to interpret prophecy. What principle? That "no prophecy of scripture [there is no article in the original] is of any private interpretation," or, literally, "of ones's own untying." Those words have been subject to at least two interpretations. The first suggests that prophets are not to intrude their own interpretations into the giving of the messages received from God. They are faithfully to deliver the prophetic words without adding their own understanding of their import. The second and more widely held view is that individual Christians are not to foist upon the church their personal interpretations of prophetic messages. The second choice seems more appropriate in the context of verse 19 and in the light of what is said about false prophets in chapter 2.

**What was Peter talking about in his day when he made his declaration concerning prophecy? 2 Peter 1:20.**

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The reference is clearly to the Old Testament Scriptures—the main body of canonical writings known to the church in Peter's day. Those scriptures were confirmed by Christ's ministry and supported by the transfiguration scene when two Old Testament prophets, Moses and Elijah, appeared with Jesus on the mountain.

**What current application can be made of Peter's declaration?**

The apostle's words carry a weighty and relevant message for people today who are exposed to so many bewildering winds of interpretation, even more than were Peter's readers, for we have both the Old and New Testament prophecies and 1900 years more of speculation with which to contend. We need to study each prophecy in the total biblical setting to ensure that our understanding harmonizes with the complete prophetic pattern. The inspired counsel should also help to prevent us from riding "hobby horses" on particular portions of prophecy to the exclusion or distortion of the whole trend of divine revelation. We need to look at the total picture in order to grasp the entire story that it is seeking to tell.

Having applied Peter's advice in the above ways, we also need to acknowledge two things: (1) how much we still have to learn about the future, and (2) how much we need to shun "private interpretations," recognizing our inability to foretell what will happen tomorrow and, still less, the exact course of more distant events, even those that are most clearly included in the grand sweep of Bible prophecy.

**DAY 5** NOTE: After dwelling on the thought of "private interpretation," it should be acknowledged that the next verse (verse 21) is not dealing with that aspect. Therefore, we need to make room for seeing also in verse 20 a reference to the origin of prophecy and to make an effort to forge a close link between the two verses.

### III. THE SOURCE OF PROPHECY (2 Peter 1:21).

Although prophecy plays such an important role in biblical literature, its origin and the way it was communicated to humanity lie largely unexplained until we read these words from Peter's pen. Here, in a nutshell, he reveals the source of authentic prophecy. First comes the negative statement, literally translated: "Not by the will of man was carried [or brought] prophecy at any time." Indeed, as the record confirms, prophecy was sometimes proclaimed against some person's will—even at times against the will of the human agent who was conveying it. Three illustrations will suffice: Balaam (Numbers 22 to 24), Jeremiah (1:1-10), and Jonah (1:1-3). Even the men and women who accepted prophetic roles did not do so from personal choice but in response to a direct call from God; often while protesting their own inadequacies, as did Moses (Ex. 3:11; 4:10-16) and Isaiah (6:5-8). Even willing spokesmen, such as Hosea, Joel, Micah, Zephaniah, and Haggai, made it clear that they were not speaking their own thoughts, but "the word of the Lord." Not one of the genuine prophecies that are preserved in the Old Testament came as the result of the prophet's own forecasts.

**What did David confess that illustrates how the prophets viewed themselves in regard to being the Lord's mouthpiece? 2 Sam. 23:2.**

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Sober thought convinces the Bible student that it could not be otherwise. Noah could not have foreseen the arrival of such a hitherto unknown phenomenon as rain, still less the resultant flood. In the early sixth century B.C., at the height of the Babylonian power, Daniel could not have seen beyond his own day to foretell the rise of Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome.

**DAY 6** To whom does Peter, in verse 21, attribute the origin of true prophecy and how does inspiration function?

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It fell to Peter to crystallize such an insight in the authoritative words that close this first chapter: "But holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Those words are momentous enough to demand our close attention. The word translated *but* is an emphatic one, implying that far from prophecy's originating in human sources, it came from an infinitely higher Source, namely, the Holy Spirit. The verb rendered *moved* in the King James Version was sometimes used in a nautical setting in Peter's day. In Acts 27:15, 17 it is rendered "we let . . . drive" and "were driven," with reference to the ship on which Paul

and the Rome-bound party were traveling, which ran before a tempestuous wind (verse 14). The apostle's use of the same word in connection with the giving of prophecy suggests that the Holy Spirit came upon the prophets with a driving force, giving them their message from God that they in turn felt impelled by a force outside themselves to pass on to their people. The entire final phrase of verse 21 might then be translated: "To the contrary, impelled by the Holy Spirit men spoke from God." There is no word "holy" attached to "men" in the original, and the words "from God" refer not so much to the prophets as to the message that God gave them to share with His people.

The same concluding phrase throws light on the way that inspiration worked on the prophet. The messenger believed himself to be God's instrument. He did not create the message; it was given him by God, and it was his mission to share it with those for whom the Lord intended it. But the prophet expressed that message in his own words, in language that was best suited to his audience or readership. The message passed through the mechanism of his own mind and personality and bore the impress of his own individuality. That process gives us the vastly differing styles of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, although each prophet delivered messages that were given directly by the Holy Spirit.

**What additional light does Paul throw on the way inspiration works? 2 Tim. 3:16.**

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**ILLUMINATION:** "The union of the divine and human, manifest in Christ, exists also in the Bible. The truths revealed are all 'given by inspiration of God;' yet they are expressed in the words of men and are adapted to human needs. Thus it may be said of the Book of God, as it was of Christ, that 'the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.' And this fact, so far from being an argument against the Bible, should strengthen faith in it as the word of God. Those who pronounce upon the inspiration of the Scriptures, accepting some portions as divine while they reject other parts as human, overlook the fact that Christ, the divine, partook of our human nature, that he might reach humanity. In the work of God for man's redemption, divinity and humanity are combined."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 747.

While Peter's concern has been the origin of Scripture prophecy, he has dealt mainly with the manner in which the prophets received and delivered their divinely given messages (verse 21). We are then indebted to Paul for enlightenment concerning the *written* Word. He states that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God," thereby making God the ultimate Author of the complete biblical message.

**NOTES:**



DAY  
7

**FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:** "Inspiration as a spiritual phenomenon is not common to all believers, but is divinely reserved for specially authorized bearers of God's message. This does not, however, imply that the message transmitted by chosen prophets and apostles is a product of mechanical divine dictation. Inspiration neither suppresses the personalities of the writers, nor puts an end to their human fallibility. Although prophets and apostles remained fallible men who shared the culture of their times, God nonetheless revealed to them information beyond their natural resources, and what they taught as doctrine has its basis in the Holy Spirit as ultimate author of their message."—Carl F. H. Henry, "Inspiration," in *New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), p. 512.

"We need divine illumination, the interior grace that moves man to give his free assent to the external Word that confronts him. A grace that invites belief, moves to faith, and makes us eager to find God, to obey Him and to be faithful to Him. This is a light not from below but from above, which enables us to read the Bible with fresh and ever deeper understanding, precisely because it has been received as the revealed and inspired Word.

"When we approach the Bible in this way, with the inner resources of a profound Christian awareness, its text seems to be lighted from within. The Word of God no longer confronts me as external to myself, as an object to be analyzed and dissected. It is a living arrow that pierces my heart, a sharp sword that penetrates to the joints and the marrow (see Heb. 4:12). The Word of God ceases to be an object, a thing. I see it as something alive. In and through the Word, God addresses me personally, not simply as an echo of the past but as a Word speaking now. I find words in the Bible I no longer simply read but that speak to me, introducing me to the crucial drama of life, the conflict between truth and falsehood, life and death, and communicate the message that God redeems those who trust in His mercy."—Raoul Dederen, "Revelation, Inspiration, and Hermeneutics," in *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed. Gordon M. Hyde (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference, 1974), p. 13.

Consider Moses' style in Deuteronomy 6, David's in Psalm 139, Isaiah's in Isaiah 40, Daniel's in Daniel 7, and John's in Revelation 21. Listen appreciatively to the differing music that emerges as the Holy Spirit plays on the variety of instruments He has selected.

**SUMMARY:** God speaks to us through His chosen human instruments. We must pay careful attention to His spoken Word and then allow the same Holy Spirit that inspired Bible writers to help us apply what we have learned.

**APPLICATION:**

- What is my concept of the role of prophecy in my life?
- What light has prophecy brought into my everyday program?
- How brilliantly is the Day Star shining in my life?
- What light does that Day Star bring to my neighbors?

# Beware of False Teachers

**THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 2 Peter 2:1-9.**

**DAY** **MEMORY TEXT:** "The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish" (Ps. 1:6).

**1**

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** At no time in its earthly history can the church expect to enjoy a trouble-free career. Its enemy will seek to seduce its members by heretical teachings; but being forewarned can mean being forearmed.

OVERVIEW—2 Peter 2:1-9	
Verses 1, 2 <b>DESTRUCTIVE HERESIES</b>	False prophets not only have introduced heresies to God's people but will continue to do so. Christians who follow such teachings bring discredit on God's church.
Verses 3-8 <b>HERESY'S FRUITAGE</b>	False teachers are motivated by covetousness, and the certainty of their judgment is illustrated by: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. the fate of the angels.</li> <li>2. the destruction of the wicked in the Flood.</li> <li>3. the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.</li> </ol>
Verses 5-9 <b>GOD'S MERCIES</b>	Yet, because God's mercy delivered Noah and Lot from the judgments mentioned, believers can rely on God's wise administration of justice mixed with mercy.

**INTRODUCTION:** In chapter 1, Peter has offered the churches positive spiritual instruction to inspire them in faithful Christian living and witnessing. He now exercises the gift of prophecy and shares his foresights with them. He foresees that past history will be reproduced, in different forms, among the maturing congregations; and he earnestly forewarns them of those coming dangers (2:1-3).

To understand the true intent of those warnings we need to remember the background against which the early Christian churches were established. They were set in a world that was almost entirely pagan. The only exceptions were the faithful Jews who worshiped the one true God in the area we know as Palestine, and the communities of similar Jews who were scattered in almost every section of the Roman Empire. Therefore,

when the apostles preached the gospel outside of Palestine, their converts were initially drawn from Jewish congregations who shared a common Abrahamic and Mosaic background with Christians. Gradually they appealed to the finer spirits in pagan communities, those who were hungering for something higher and holier than their own mythical and often disreputable deities. In addition, there were the honest agnostics who rejected the pagan gods while being dimly aware of the need for a faith that would be more satisfying than any that they had yet discovered.

As always, there were cranks and extremists who distorted even the best teachings of any group to which they were attracted. Judaism already had suffered from such, and by the first century A.D. it had gathered many unbiblical teachings to itself. Heathen cults gave birth to bizarre philosophies that centered on many gods. Their offspring were demon worship and licentiousness that was encouraged and practiced under the guise of religion. The morality of the practitioners of such religions could rise no higher than the level of their degraded sources.

Because of the normal influx of half-converted pagans and the laxity of some of its members, the infant church could not remain untouched by such closely surrounding influences from without and by disruptive forces from within. The New Testament shows that from its early days the church was disturbed by non-Christian influences. Paul was troubled by Elymas the sorcerer, Jupiter worshipers in Lystra, the soothsaying damsel in Philippi, the philosophers at Athens, the exorcists at Ephesus, and by supporters of Artemis (whom the Romans named Diana) of the Ephesians. After Paul and other apostles had passed on their way, leaving the newly founded churches to the leadership of others, it is not surprising that the fledgling congregations also came under attack from rival forces within.

Peter was well aware of the dangers that assailed his beloved converts and friends, and warned them, in considerable detail, about the teachings that might weaken or destroy their faith.

#### DAY I. DESTRUCTIVE HERESIES (2 Peter 2:1, 2).

**2**

*False teachers.* In the previous chapter Peter expressed his complete faith in the messages given by God through His prophets (1:19-21). Much of that ministry already had been recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures that Moses began in the second millennium B.C. and Malachi completed almost 500 years before Peter wrote. The "holy men of God" had not been unopposed in their work. In chapter 2, Peter reminded his fellow Christians that there were, even then, "false prophets among the people"; that is, among the chosen people. From the day when the deceiver uttered his falsehood, "Ye shall not surely die" (Gen. 3:4), there had been no lack of those who were ready to contradict the warnings, the reproofs, and the statements of fact that God conveyed to His people through His servants the prophets.

**EXAMPLES:** Miriam and Aaron were numbered among the waverers at least once, as were ten of the twelve spies (Numbers 12 to 14). Moses had to warn Israel against such deceptions during the wilderness

wanderings (Deut. 13:1-5). In the days of the judges and throughout the later years of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel similar troubles plagued rulers and people. (See 1 Kings 22 for example.) The effects of Jeremiah's ministry were often weakened by rival prophets who falsely foretold peace instead of the destruction that came upon Judah (Jer. 14:13-16; 28:1-17; 29:30-32), while Micah and Zephaniah felt compelled to warn against similar apostates (Micah 3:5-12; Zeph. 3:4).

**What application to his readers does Peter make of Israel's past experiences with false prophets? 2 Peter 2:1.**

Peter's awareness of the dangers that confronted church members was doubtless heightened by his Lord's warning that "many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many" (Matt. 24:11) and that deception would continue to plague the church until the end of time (Matt. 24:23-27). For the most part, the apostle wrote in the future tense saying, "There *shall be* false teachers among you" (2 Peter 2:1, emphasis supplied). Later in the chapter (verse 10 and following) Peter uses the present tense to indicate that he was well acquainted with the troublemakers' aims and methods. The state of the churches seemed to be fairly firm at the time he wrote; but, beyond doubt, disturbers would arise. Therefore, he did his best to alert the believers to the dangers that threatened them.

**NOTE** that the "false" ones that shall come are not called prophets but "teachers." This may suggest that they will not introduce new doctrines or lay claim to prophetic visions, but will distort those already received by the Christian congregations. We would hope that the apostle's warnings were so well heeded as to save many in the churches from being deceived. The language is specific enough to justify the hope that his firm words enabled his readers to identify false teachings. With that hope, we can now turn to examine briefly some of their distortions.

DAY

3

**What reason do you see for the strong language used to identify the evil that comes from false teachings? 2 Peter 2:1, 2.**

*False teachings.* The phrase "privily shall bring in" may be rendered literally "shall bring in alongside," or could be translated "introduce secretly or maliciously." In Galatians 2:4 a similar word is translated as "un-awares brought in," confirming the impression that the deceivers, like the false prophets, far from being imported from outside, arose among the believers themselves. The strong accusation that they would secretly introduce "damnable heresies" may be more accurately and acceptably expressed as "destructive heresies" or "heresies that lead to perdition."

Here we may pause to suggest a definition of "heresy" and to apply that to the conditions that Peter foresaw. The Greek word used is capable of several applications. It was used for the capturing of a town, or a taking for oneself, therefore "choosing" or "choice." It also came to refer to a philosophy, the style of thought, thence to a "sect" (see Acts 24:5), and

thus to unorthodox teaching (Acts 24:14), and, as in Christian usage, to “heresy.”

**NOTE** how the early church made use of the term, employing it for disruptive teachings. Gal. 5:20; 1 Cor. 11:19.

In 2 Peter 2:1 the term is used specifically for teachings that are judged to be unacceptable to the church. Some of these can be identified from what follows in the second chapter—denial of Christ as divine Redeemer (verse 1), promoting conduct unworthy of a Christian (verse 2), and making merchandise of believers, that is, using them for the teachers’ own profit (verse 3) or for immoral ends (verses 10, 13, 14, 18). Unfortunately, such teachings were not limited to Peter’s time. They seem to have started a trend that has appeared many times in subsequent church history.

*Effect of False Teachings.* As we look at the teachings Peter mentions, their destructive nature is readily apparent. First and worst is the denial of “the Lord that bought them.” The seducers must at one time have acknowledged Christ as their sovereign Lord and have been numbered among those who had been “bought” by His redeeming sacrifice. (The same word for “bought” is used in 1 Corinthians 6:20—“ye are bought with a price.”) Later, for undisclosed reasons, they apostatized to the point of denying the divinity of Him “who is the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15). (Compare 1 John 2:18-22.) What worse accusation could be leveled against any professing Christian? Peter, remembering his own cowardly denial, must have formed that phrase with deep contrition as well as strong conviction. He must have shrunk from seeing others follow his shameful example and must have exerted all his spiritual powers to turn them from such denial. Unless they repented of their blasphemy, their fate was sealed, not by any arbitrary act on God’s part, but because their conduct would “bring upon themselves swift destruction” (compare Phil. 3:18, 19), that is, eternal death.

**DAY 4** The effect of evildoing rarely falls on the sinner alone. Who else suffers?  
2 Peter 2:2.

Others also suffer. In this case Peter sees that “many shall follow their pernicious ways” (2 Peter 2:2). The original wording calls for a more specific description of the false teachers’ conduct, the reference being to “licentious conduct” or “sexual debaucheries” or “dissolute practices” (NEB). This translation is confirmed by the writer’s later charges of “filthy conversation” (verse 7) or “immoral conduct” (TEV) and to “lusts of the flesh” in verse 18. Such a life-style harms not only the wrongdoers but those who copy their lamentable example. In this case Peter foresees that many otherwise faithful church members would be led into sin. If teachers, claiming to be divinely commissioned, commit heinous sin, it is hardly surprising that those who look to them for models will follow their example. Satan always has played on sexual allurements, from Noah’s day (Gen. 6:1-5) throughout Israel’s history (Ex. 32:1-6, 19, 25; Num. 25:1-9;

2 Sam. 11:1-5; 1 Kings 14:21-24), into the history of the early church, and on to our own day. We should listen carefully to what history tells us.

**THINK IT THROUGH:** How widespread is the influence of immoral conduct among Christians today? What special dangers beset present-day Christians?

*Truth maligned.* The harboring of false teaching raises the danger that the church will fall into disrepute. That danger is great indeed when the heresies foster immorality; for, no matter how tolerant the world may be of its own who break its moral standards, it is quick to scorn those who profess Christianity while flouting its extremely high ideals.

Peter, then, is touching upon a sensitive spot when he asserts that “the way of truth shall be evil spoken of” because of those who have followed “pernicious ways” or “dissolute practices.” The words “by reason of whom” may apply either to the false teachers or to those who have fallen prey to their wiles. It is possible that both classes are included, for both bring the church into disrepute.

The phrase “the way of truth” refers to the church, as it also does in Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22 where it simply is identified as “the way.” The wider definition here, “the way of truth,” stands in stark contrast to the falsehood of the heretical teachers and exalts the Head of the church who is Himself “the way” and “the truth” (John 14:6). This brings added encouragement for us as Christians to live truthfully.

## DAY II. HERESY'S FRUITAGE (2 Peter 2:3-8).

5

How does Peter clearly unmask the false teachers' disguise? 2 Peter 2:3.

The false teachers earn condemnation not only because of their theological aberrations, serious and dangerous as those are, but also because of weakness in character. They are covetous or greedy. This trait leads them to prey on their dupes. They employ “feigned” or false words, the original adjective being that from which we derive our term “plastic,” in the sense of imitation as distinct from the genuine. They do this for mercenary ends. They have taken up the Christian religion not because of sincere conviction but because of what they can gain from it.

In Peter's world, as in ours, many hypocritical religionists profess Christianity only because of the material profit that they obtain from it, whether in money, property, or free board and lodging. To this end, those who would plague Peter's congregations would “make merchandise of” them. From the Greek root for this expression comes the English word *emporium*—a large store, a market, a house of merchandise. This vividly illustrates the mercenary motives that lead false and covetous teachers to manipulate the faithful for personal gain. What can be more despicable? Their unmasking in these verses should warn all ministers and church employees to resist the temptation to enrich themselves at the expense of the membership and to be transparently honest at all times.

There is light on the horizon. These merchants will not be allowed to operate undisturbed. Their “judgment” or punishment is assured, and

will not be delayed long. As promised in verse 1, "swift destruction" awaits them. In verse 3, Peter uses the same word as Matthew employs in recording the parable of the ten virgins who "slumbered" while the bridegroom tarried (Matt. 25:5). The assurance here is that the destruction of the false teachers will not become drowsy or fail. Their end is certain. This assurance must have strengthened those who would suffer from their attentions.

**THINK IT THROUGH:** What can we who read these words today learn from Peter's counsel?

What three illustrations are given concerning the inevitability of God's judgments? 2 Peter 2:4-8.

1. *Rebellious Angels (verse 4)*. The point here is that, if God did not spare the hitherto sinless angels when they sinned, He will not pass over the sins of the false teachers. The fallen angels were "consigned to Tartarus" and "gloomy dungeons" (NIV), presumably until judgment day. What a bleak outlook for those who lead God's children astray!

2. *The Antediluvian World (verse 5)*. This illustration refers to the Flood that destroyed the antediluvian world, and from which only Noah and his family were saved through belief in God's warning word (Gen. 6:5-22). In citing this brighter side of the fearful flood, Peter encourages Christians to persevere in righteousness instead of succumbing to general godlessness. They should emulate Noah, "a preacher" or "a herald" of righteousness who preached by deed as well as by word.

3. *Sodom and Gomorrah (verse 6-8)*. The dissolute cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were burned to ashes because of their wicked ways. Yet, as Peter implies, this need not have been. The angels who warned Abraham and Lot about the imminent destruction of the two cities also searched those towns for inhabitants who would repent and escape the holocaust (Gen. 18:20-32). Only four residents qualified. They were Lot, his wife, and their two daughters (Gen. 19:15, 16); and even their spiritual caliber was frail. Yet the Lord, in His generous mercy, described Lot as being "just" and "vexed" by the dissolute conduct of his neighbors. Lot certainly was far from perfect. The Bible story pictures him as being weak and selfish, choosing to dwell among the ungodly. Nevertheless, he accepted the divine offer of salvation from the destruction to be visited on Sodom. These negative and positive aspects of his character offer both warning and encouragement for us today.

### DAY III. GOD'S MERCIES (2 Peter 2:5-9).

6

Fearing that his readers might become discouraged by reading of the false teachers and their evil influence, Peter includes positive encouragement that is based on his knowledge of the Lord's qualities.

Where and how do we find deliverance from temptation? 2 Peter 2:9, first part.

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Peter may have been recalling Jesus' prayer asking the Father to "lead

us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matt. 6:13). The petition embodies two aspects of deliverance from temptation. The first keeps us out of trouble; the second rescues us from temptation's toils should we have fallen into them. This should serve to remind us, as one writer has well expressed it, that "Christianity is no insurance policy against the trials of life." But we should note that even the "godly" need deliverance from temptation.

Having made these general observations based on the standard translations of 2 Peter 2:9, we turn to consider other emphases and possible interpretations.

"The Lord knoweth" stresses God's total knowledge, even of evil, for "all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13). He is therefore well able to care for His own, the "godly" or "God-fearing" or "devout," being constantly alert to their situations—be they comfortable or otherwise.

The word translated "temptations" may also be expressed as "trial," referring to the trouble that comes from the ungodly. This reminds us of the psalmist's assurance: "The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. . . . Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all" (Ps. 34:17-19). Peter already has illustrated these truths by referring to the rescue of Noah and Lot from their dire emergencies (2 Peter 2:5, 7).

*Warning.* As surely as the Lord is able to deliver the godly from their troubles, so He is certain to reserve or keep the wicked unto the final day of judgment to be punished (verse 9). The words "to be punished" would relegate punishment to a future date, but a more accurate translation renders the relevant word as "being punished." This implies that the disturbers of the faith, for Peter still has the false teachers in mind, receive some of their punishment during this life, prior to judgment day. Some may appear to flourish as a green bay tree (Ps. 37:35), but their lives are by no means a bed of roses, and the day of judgment awaits them.

**DAY 7 FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:** Relate the second paragraph on page 478 of *The Desire of Ages* to Peter's counsel as discussed in this week's lesson.

**SUMMARY:** False teachers always have been used and will continue to be used by Satan to disrupt if possible the work and progress of God's church. Many will be led astray by them; but, in order to be ensnared by false teachings, they will have to ignore the clear warning that God gave the church through Peter and the warnings that He continues to give the church today.

**APPLICATION:**

- How susceptible am I to subversive teachings?
- What progress have I made during the past year in understanding major Christian doctrines?
- How is the "way of truth" spoken of by those who observe my way of life?
- How faithfully do I fortify my soul and mind through regular Bible study and prayer?



# Contrasting Fates

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 2 Peter 2:9-16.

DAY MEMORY TEXT:

1

"Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle?

Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?

He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness,

And speaketh the truth in his heart" (Ps. 15:1, 2).

CENTRAL THOUGHT: "Righteousness exalts a nation [or, an individual] but sin is a disgrace to any people" (Prov. 14:34, NIV).

OVERVIEW		
Contrasting Fates—2 Peter 2:9-16		
Group	Present Fate	Ultimate Fate
Righteous	Delivered from temptation	Deliverance
Heretics	Destroyed by their own corruption Judged by their own judgment Sensual appetite cannot be satisfied Neither can greed Balaam's actions serve as an example	Shall utterly perish

**INTRODUCTION:** Does it bother you when you hear about someone in the church teaching something contrary to the fundamental doctrines that characterize the Adventist Church? It is clear that Peter is filled with indignation as he thinks about the devastation that might be wrought in his beloved Christian assemblies by the work of unprincipled teachers. Yet his first thought, remembering the Lord's power to deliver from evil, is positive and encouraging, both to him and his readers. At the same time, he is no less sure about the punishment of the unjust (verse 9). By way of warning, and in an outpouring of indignation directed primarily at heretical teachers, he lists the latter's shortcomings, showing them to include sensuality, flouting and defamation of authority, rudeness, an excessive love of pleasure, and covetousness. He contrasts their rebellious

attitudes to those of angels who refrain from judging the rebels. The sinful ways of the unprincipled teachers remind him of Balaam's conduct.

That portrayal of evil—and evil it must be called as we see the damage it produces in the lives of people everywhere—does not have merely historical value. It has been preserved as part of inspired Scripture “for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Cor. 10:11). It will serve as a touchstone to enable us to discern between good and evil, to avoid theological and spiritual pitfalls, and to hold fast in the church to “whatsoever things are true, . . . whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report” (Phil. 4:8).

This lesson should not lead us to point the finger of scorn at some person we might consider less godly or less orthodox than ourselves. Instead it should cause us to look within at the fountain from which our thoughts and actions spring. A knowledge of true doctrine is not enough to keep us from the kind of heresy that concerns Peter. Christ must control our thoughts and motives.

## DAY I. DELIVERANCE OR JUDGMENT? (2 Peter 2:9, 10).

2

Verse 9 draws the contrast between the fate of the righteous and the fate of the wicked in the final judgment but is most concerned with what happens to both groups in the present life.

**What does the Lord “know,” and how effective is His ability to put this knowledge into practice?**

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The Lord is portrayed here as “knowing” two things: (1) how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and (2) how to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.

*Delivering the godly out of temptation.* “Temptation” here refers both to enticement to sin and the trials that come upon those who steadfastly resist sin. In verses 5 and 7 Peter cites the illustrations of Noah and Lot. Peter might have spoken from personal experience. If he had done so, he could have mentioned his denial of Christ and how Jesus had warned him of what he would do, thus helping him withstand the discouragement that followed his denial. He also could have mentioned his deliverance from prison recorded in Acts 12:5-17.

**ILLUMINATION:** “To all who are reaching out to feel the guiding hand of God, the moment of greatest discouragement is the time when divine help is nearest. They will look back with thankfulness upon the darkest part of their way. ‘The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly.’ 2 Peter 2:9. From every temptation and every trial He will bring them forth with firmer faith and a richer experience.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 528.

*Reserving the unjust unto the day of judgment.* Peter has illustrated this fact in what happened at the Flood (verse 5) and to Sodom and Gomorrah (verse 6). The “day of judgment” is to be equated with the “day of the Lord” (2 Peter 3:7, 10).

**ILLUMINATION:** "To be punished. Literally, 'being punished.' There are two well-defined schools of thought concerning Peter's theology:

"1. That the participle 'being punished' expresses purpose, as reflected in the translation 'to be punished,' that is, for the purpose of being punished. This explanation assigns the punishment here mentioned to the day of judgment.

"2. That the participle should be translated 'while being punished,' with reference to the retribution that sin brings to the unjust during their earthly lives. This interpretation accords more closely with the first half of v. 9, according to which the godly are delivered from the temptations and trials that beset them in this life. But the unjust, at the same time, are suffering as a result of their misdeeds."—*S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 606, 607.

**DAY 3** What does Peter add to his thorough list of the "lawless deeds" or shortcomings of the heretical teachers? 2 Peter 2:10.

At this point we might think that Peter has said all that is needed about the ungodly teachers; but no, he has much more to add, hence the words "but chiefly" or "especially" (NIV). Beginning with verse 10, he enlarges on their despicable characters. They are "them that walk after the flesh," that is, they pursue fleshly pleasures to the exclusion of higher concerns. (Compare Rom. 8:1-8.) In the New Testament "flesh" is the opposite of "spirit" and refers to the lower nature in which animal desire dominates over the spiritual. In this case, the renegade teachers are said to "indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires" (NASB). Some read a reference to homosexuality in Peter's strong words, although they are not as explicit as Paul's in Romans 1:24-27. Nevertheless, they strongly condemn the sexual license taken by the apostates.

"*And despise government.*" The seducers also "despise government" or "look down upon authority." A literal translation of the Greek word here rendered as "government" suggests "lordship" which, in the light of verses 1 and 11, would refer to their denial of Christ's royal authority. This *blasphemy* (the Greek word occurs at the end of verse 10, but is translated in the King James Version as "speak evil of") is hardly surprising for the false teachers are further described as "presumptuous" or, translating more accurately, as "audacious," and as being "stubborn" or "arrogant," having no natural respect for dignities (literally "glories"), that is, glorious beings who can be identified as angels or be seen to include all of God's celestial family. Some commentators, however, prefer to limit the reference to disrespect for church authorities on earth.

**DAY II. ANGELS OR ANIMALS? (2 Peter 2:11-14).**

**4**

*The example of angels (verse 11).* Human beings often regard themselves as the norm, setting their own standards as if there were no higher orders of creatures in the universe. Knowing the temperaments of the enticers, the apostle contrasts them with the greatly superior order of angels, "which are greater in power and might." This reminds us that in the

Judeo-Christian world of the first century angels played a much more prominent role than they seem to in ours.

But mention of angels brings no comfort to the adversaries. To the contrary, the writer appeals to angelic conduct as a rebuke to the irreverent and blasphemous railings of the enemy. The apostle appears to be referring to the loyal angels "which are greater in might and power" in contrast either to the defeated angels (compare Rev. 12:7, 8) or to the evil teachers who would be weaker still.

The original words translated as "railing accusation" in the King James Version of verse 11 may be more accurately rendered as "blasphemous judgment," revealing the audacity of those who criticize heavenly authorities in God's presence ("before the Lord") and those whom God has placed in authority in His church.

**THINK IT THROUGH:** Church leaders, being human, sometimes make mistakes. What does 2 Peter 2:11 indicate should be our attitude when we are convinced that something they are doing is wrong? How should we go about doing what we can in expressing our opinion in a Christian way?

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Why do you think Peter makes the caustic analysis that he does of the seducers' characters? 2 Peter 2:12-14.

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*Creatures of Instinct.* Peter now returns (verse 12) to an unmasking of the delinquents' additional shortcomings, which are many. He does not mince words. He compares them to "natural brute beasts" or unreasoning animals, creatures of instinct, produced to be captured and destroyed or hunted for food. They have allowed themselves to descend to a brutish level. What a devastating description of any human being, let alone those who claim to be spiritual advisors! In the heat of his disgust he directly accuses the teachers of blasphemy, for they speak irreverently of divine matters of which they are demonstrably ignorant. Their interests have been so earthly that they have become incapable of discerning the heavenly. As a result, they will be destroyed by their own depravity. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption" (Gal. 6:7, 8). That is not an arbitrary judgment, but a natural outcome of evil. Persistent sinners bring about their own destruction—"sin, when its finished, bringeth forth death" (James 1:15).

**NOTE** how such a retribution for wickedness is in accord with that which is foretold concerning "the prince of Tyre," who typifies Satan. Eze. 28:18.

Sinners are destroyed by that which comes from inside themselves—sin brings forth "a fire from the midst" of them and that fire consumes them. That consuming process is not limited to the time of the final judgment but is evident in the sinners' unhappiness and dissatisfaction in this life.

DAY **5** To what blasphemous lengths do these depraved apostates go? 2 Peter 2:13 (last part), 14.

In the original there is no verse division between the phrases that we identify as verses 13 and 14, and neither verse is a complete sentence. This continuity influences our understanding of Peter's denunciation of the depraved apostates. They are described in verse 14 as "having eyes full of adultery." Some think that the "feast" Peter mentions is the celebration of the Last Supper. Even during the most sacred of all commemorations, these wicked men look with lustful eyes on the women members of the congregation. They have so fed their minds with sensual thoughts that they *cannot* break the cycle of their fleshly desires. Their lusts crowd out the loftier aspirations that should rule the mind during the communion service. Even in the presence of God they "cannot cease from sin." They are insatiable in their sexual appetites. Worse still, they beguile unstable souls, that is, they lure others, especially the weak, to follow their deplorable example. Any who are tempted to engage in such practices should recall the Master's warning: "Whoso shall offend [that is, cause to stumble] one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matt. 18:6).

The catalog of these beguilers' weaknesses is not complete even then. Their hearts or affections are said to get their exercise (the Greek word is based on that from which we derive "gymnastics") by fostering covetous desires. Instead of being content, they allow themselves to become "past masters in mercenary greed" (NEB). How different would have been their reputation if they had heeded Christ's counsel to "beware of covetousness" (Luke 12:15) and had recognized the truth of Paul's analysis that "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Tim. 6:10, NIV). And how much happier our lives will be if we learn, at an early stage, to control our possessive instincts and decide, like Paul, in whatsoever state we are, therewith to be content (Phil. 4:11). Greed is its own worst enemy, as it never can be satisfied.

The final words in verse 14, "cursed children," may be taken as an exclamation that bursts from the writer's anguished heart as he surveys the harm done to his flock by the godless conduct of the false religionists.

DAY **6** III. COMPARISON WITH BALAAM (2 Peter 2:15, 16).

In what ways is it appropriate for Peter to compare the heretical teachers with Balaam? 2 Peter 2:15, 16.

Confrontation with the covetousness of the venal instructors reminds Peter of their prototype, Balaam the son of Beor. (See Numbers 22 through 24 for his story.) This man, who certainly could have been an effective prophet of the Most High God, sold himself to Israel's enemy for financial gain. The unfaithful leaders in Asia Minor succumbed to a similar temptation. Following Balaam's example, they had forsaken the right

or the upright way. That shows that they had known the true from the false, the righteous way of life from the unrighteous. But they had wandered from the right path. As was true in the case of Balaam, their greed led them to prefer "the wages of unrighteousness," "of injustice" or "wrongdoing," over the less tangible rewards of rightdoing.

We must not infer from that description of the "wages" or "reward" that were offered to Balaam (see Num. 22:17, 18; 24:13) that all profit is evil. The morality of having wealth largely depends on the manner in which it is gained and used. Peter here uses the intensive Greek word for "loved," possibly indicating the depth of the dissemblers' greed and attachment to material things. As did Balaam, they seek financial gain at the expense of spiritual integrity.

The writer now brings his long sentence (verses 12-16) to a close with a phrase that is an integral part of verse 15: "But was rebuked for his iniquity," or his violation of law, God's law. The rebuke came first from the donkey's refusal to continue the journey on which Balaam was bent, and then from the angel whose presence the donkey had sensed (Num. 22:22-27). The prophet's persistence in a course of action that was motivated by greed is described as "madness" (2 Peter 2:16). Obstinate persistence in wrongdoing amounts to insanity. The apostle's plain speaking is intended to set a loud bell ringing in his readers' minds. He does not want them or us to follow misleading models. He knew Balaam's end: "Balaam also the son of Beor they [the Israelites] slew with the sword" (Num. 31:8).

**DAY 7 FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:** Read *Testimonies*, volume 5, pages 141 through 148.

"Temptations" or "Trials." "These trials of life are God's workmen to remove the impurities, infirmities, and roughness from our characters, and fit us for the society of pure, heavenly angels in glory. But as we pass through these trials, as the fires of affliction kindle upon us, we must not keep the eye on the fire which is seen, but let the eye of faith fasten upon the things unseen, the eternal inheritance, the immortal life, the eternal weight of glory; and while we do this the fire will not consume us, but only remove the dross, and we shall come forth seven times purified, bearing the impress of the Divine."—*Testimonies*, vol. 1, pp. 706, 707.

**SUMMARY:** God delivers the righteous out of temptations. The record of His dealings with His people in the past assures us that He is more than capable of and willing to deliver His people from temptation today. On the other hand, the wicked are destroyed by their own corruption. Sin is self-destroying.

#### APPLICATION:

- As you recall occasions when the Lord has delivered you out of temptation, was your cooperation required? In what ways did you cooperate?
- Which, if any, of the five or six undesirable attitudes listed in 2 Peter 2:10 operate in your life?
- Do you allow room in your life for the ministry of angels? In what ways ought you to do so?

# Unfruitful and Dangerous

**THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** 2 Peter 2:17-22.

**DAY 1** **MEMORY TEXT:** "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. . . . Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:18-20).

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** When a professed Christian turns back to deliberate sin, his second state is worse than his first.

OVERVIEW—2 Peter 2:17-22		
Verse 17	Verses 18-20	Verses 21, 22
Wells without water	Slaves to sin	Washed sows wallowing in the mire again

**INTRODUCTION:** Many of the words and phrases Peter uses in his second chapter sound extremely harsh to our ears. However, we need to remember the background against which he wrote this letter. He loved his readers. It is possible that he knew some of them personally and believed in the genuineness of their conversions, for he describes them as having "obtained like precious faith with us" (2 Peter 1:1). From afar he has heard of the disruptive work being done among them by those who claim to be teachers, but who live such dissolute lives and teach such destructive doctrines that they are destroying the congregations that Peter himself may have helped to establish.

News of such harmful activity prompts the apostle to write in defense of the faith in order to fortify believers and to expose the errors of those who are leading so many astray. These objectives help to explain the strong, blunt language that Peter uses in chapter 2. It tears off the mask of false sanctity and reveals the seducers for the renegade sinners that they truly are.

If that were all that the epistle accomplishes, it would have merely historical value some 1900 years later. But we find that, as so often in Scripture, the ancient words are remarkably up-to-date and their message suits many of the circumstances that confront us in the late twentieth century. Thus this week's study can be both interesting and profitable for each of us today.

## I. DECEIVERS UNMASKED (2 Peter 2:17-19).

*Waterless wells (verse 17).* Peter now turns from the historical illustrations that he has been using to underline the evil nature of the heretical teachers—antediluvians, Sodom and Gomorrah, rebellious angel—to deal with those teachers' characters. He takes a leaf out of his Lord's notebook and virtually tells his congregations, "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:20). In powerful strokes he paints vivid pictures of the deceivers (verse 17). Because he is writing to those who were often dependent on wells or springs for their water, his first two metaphors would catch their immediate attention.

**What is the significance of the way Peter illustrates the barren nature of the seducers' ministry? 2 Peter 2:17.**

Few among those who read or heard his words would fail to grasp the immediate significance of his charge that the perverters were as useless and as dangerous as "wells without water." The initial readers would know from experience the frustrations and perils that lurked in dry wells. The thirsty would run to a well from which water had been regularly drawn, only to hear the empty bucket bang against the dry soil that held not a drop of moisture. They would hurry to the next well, only to repeat the discovery. Fear of widespread drought would strike their minds.

Peter implies in a similar way that church members would go to professed teachers and ministers expecting them to provide the water of life, drawn from the wells of salvation. Alas, many thirsty souls were doomed to bitter disappointment. These false teachers had no spiritual water with which to quench the believers' thirst. They were full of destructive criticisms, disloyal suggestions, covetous desires, and poor theology; but they were empty of positive, orthodox scriptural teaching. If left undisturbed they would destroy the churches that had been raised up by the faithful apostles and their collaborators.

*Rainless clouds (verse 17).* In a similar but different illustration the writer reinforces his condemnation of those who were undermining the churches. He likens them to clouds or mists that bring hope of rain to drought-stricken people but quickly are dissipated or driven away by a squall of wind, leaving the thirsty ones thirstier than ever. Peter's congregations would appreciate that picture, for their hopes had risen when the teachers had first appeared. The believers were thirsting after righteousness. They welcomed the bold instructors, hoping that they were bringing them the water of life, but soon discovered that they were empty of lifegiving teaching. Their disappointment was no less keen than that of the thirsty traveler who was robbed of his hope of finding water. Such a thirst would be more intense than when the deceptive teachers first appeared. It would be heightened by the spiritually dry, lifeless teachings of the false ones.

**What bleak future is assured for such false teachers? 2 Peter 2:17.**



Such deceptive teaching meets its just punishment. For them, says Peter, "the mist of darkness is reserved for ever." The apostle's figure of speech actually is more vivid than the King James Version implies. He declares that the apostates will be sent into "the blackness of the darkness," or "the blackest darkness." He sees them sharing the same eternal fate as that of "the angels that sinned," whom God had delivered into similar gloom (verse 4).

DAY

3

*The Water of life.* The contrast between the false prophets' service and that of the One whom they claimed to serve is heightened by Peter's choice of illustration. They are "wells without water," but Christ provides "a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). Whereas they could not even fill a spiritual cup with life-giving liquid, Jesus gives His true followers "living water" so that they "shall never thirst" (John 4:10). The dramatic differences furnish us with a means of measuring the efficacy of human ministry—does it meet the spiritual needs of those who "thirst after righteousness" (Matt. 5:6)? If it does not, the remedy lies first with a change in those who have been deceiving the churches. They need to drink from the Fount of Life, for "whosoever drinketh of the water" that Christ "shall give him shall never thirst"; and that water "shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14).

**What principal method did the teachers use to ruin the believers' Christian experience? 2 Peter 2:18.**

The apostle now turns from figures of speech and in plain, but powerful, language identifies the seductions of the apostate teachers. In doing so, he unmasks the means by which they lure the honest but weak Christians into their snares. They "speak great swelling words of vanity." Such pompous and boastful words are devoid of genuine spiritual significance. Their principal instrument of seduction is "the lusts of the flesh," that age-old inducement to sin that the devil has used so successfully among God's children.

**SEARCH AND LEARN:** Show how the texts that follow illustrate the devil's success in using the "lusts of the flesh" to cause people to sin.

Gen. 6:1, 2, 5 \_\_\_\_\_

Ex. 32:1-6, 19, 25 \_\_\_\_\_

Num. 25:1-9 \_\_\_\_\_

**Add two more** \_\_\_\_\_

Peter's scathing words gain added justification as we learn that the seducers' victims were "those that were clean escaped from them who live

in error" (2 Peter 2:18). This reveals that many of those who were caught in the lustful teachers' toils were new converts. Having recently escaped from the errors of paganism, they had not put sufficient distance as yet between their new life and their old. They were not mature enough Christians to withstand the sexual enticements that were dangled before their eyes. As of today Satan has not found it necessary to change his principal tools of seduction. They are as effective now as they were in the days of the first church. How open-eyed we need to be to discern right from wrong!

DAY  
4

To what basic law does the false teacher's conduct point? 2 Peter 2:19.

The Galilean fisherman had gained deeper spiritual insight since the day when he "forsook all, and followed" Jesus (Luke 5:11). From a distance, piecing together the distressing news that reached him from Asia Minor, he rightly analyzed the tactics of those who were leading new converts astray. They were employing some of the same sophistries that still are being used today—promising liberty, freedom for each to indulge his or her own pet sins while professing allegiance to Christ. They were reversing the process described by Paul when he wrote of being "delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21). They were falsely proclaiming freedom from the "bondage" of the gospel and, in so doing, were ensnaring new Christians in the kind of sin from which it would be harder to escape than when they first left paganism.

In what way were the false teachers living illustrations of the falseness of their own claims? Verse 19.

"They themselves are slaves of depravity" (NIV). It was not possible for the false teachers to lead others astray without setting the evil example themselves. Conversely, it was not possible for them to set others truly at liberty without enjoying freedom from overt sin in their own lives. Unknown to themselves, they truly were "slaves of sin," enslaved by the evil one as surely as if they were shackled literally to Satan. This truth is stated by Peter in a most perceptive way: "Of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage" (verse 19), or "a man is the slave of whatever has mastered him" (NEB). This profound truth needs emphasizing in our permissive age. Also it should alert all Christians to the danger of becoming enslaved by a specific sin, as well as by weaknesses in general.

NOTE how Peter may have been echoing the Lord's judgment recorded in John 8:34.

DAY  
5

II. THE ENTANGLEMENT OF DECEPTION (2 Peter 2:20-22).

How relevant to our situation today is the apostle's description of teaching heresy and engaging in warfare against the church? 2 Peter 2:20.

It is preferable to see the remaining verses in this chapter as referring to the apostate teachers ("they themselves" in verse 19) rather than to those whom they had duped (those who had recently escaped from paganism). The deceivers *had*, at one time, "escaped the pollutions" (shameful deeds and crimes; hence, moral pollutions) "of the world." This they had done by their personal knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ—the only way of escape. This suggests that those teachers had been born-again Christians but had lost their first love, had become enamored of worldly pleasures and vices, and had apostatized. They were living warnings to faithful Christians.

Although the writer refers primarily to the wayward teachers, his succeeding comments provide warnings to us as Christians today. For that purpose he employs fisherman terminology. We, like the apostates, can be "again entangled therein [like fish in a net] and overcome" by "the pollutions of the world." Paul, to a similar end, admonishes us: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). (See also Heb. 2:1, 3.)

There is no doubt in Peter's mind as to the fate of those who, having intimately known the Lord, reject Him and return to serve His enemy. The "latter end is worse with them than the beginning" (verse 20). This mournful but just pronouncement agrees with the opinion expressed in Hebrews 6:4-6: "It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, . . . if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance." (See also Matt. 12:31; Heb. 10:26-29.) This is one of the saddest judgments in history, but it is not arbitrary. It is the inevitable outcome of the free choice made by those who, once having accepted, now reject Christ's freely offered salvation. "He who has once been a Christian but has gone back to the world becomes spiritually hardened and less responsive to spiritual appeals. His salvation thus becomes more difficult."—*S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 610.

**NOTE** the significant title by which Peter pays homage to his Master. He, and he alone, speaks of the Redeemer by His composite title, "the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:11; 2:20; 3:18).

"God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (1:1) and "the Lord and Saviour" (3:2) come close to the full reverence of the longer title. Only Paul, in Titus 1:4, comes near to that description as he speaks of "the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour." Of the Gospel writers, only Luke, recording the angel's announcement, writes of "a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (2:11); while John, preserving the Samaritans' verdict, records, "this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world" (4:42). Our own reverence can be strengthened by contemplating the breadth of meaning found in Peter's loving recognition of his Master's multiple offices.

DAY

6

To what sad conclusions had Peter come concerning the deceivers?  
2 Peter 2:21.

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Recognition of the perils of apostasy leads to agreement with the con-

clusion expressed in 2 Peter 2:21. Possession of knowledge always brings responsibility. When once we have heard of a law, for instance, we cannot plead ignorance of its requirements; we have become subject to it. So it was with the backsliders. They had known from personal experience "the way of righteousness," that is, *the Way*, the Christian way that leads to righteousness through faith in Christ Jesus. They had known it well enough to become its prophets and teachers, albeit unworthy ones. It would have been better for them not to have known it; then they would have stood on neutral ground and been able to evaluate the Christian message at its true worth and to respond wholeheartedly to its high calling. This they could not now do, for they had turned from it and were persuading others to reject it. In so doing they brought themselves under judgment, against which they could not plead ignorance.

*The holy commandment.* At the close of verse 21 Peter reveals the root cause of the disaster that struck the apostate teachers. They had turned "from the holy commandment delivered unto them." This was a deliberate act on their part. Indeed, some of the Greek manuscripts imply that they "turned back from," that is, they turned their backs on the holy commandment that had been delivered to them. And what was that "holy commandment"? A literal interpretation might lead to Luke 10:27, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, . . . and thy neighbour as thyself." That commandment summarizes the essence of true Christianity and all the laws of God. A more specific application sees Peter's phrase as an indictment of the apostates' antagonism to law in general; their claim to be above law, free from it, able to do whatsoever their impulses urged them to do. In this philosophy there was nothing new—it was the same old story of human beings wanting to go their own way and indulge their own appetites and inclinations, even when contrary to the law of God which is "the holy commandment."

**In what blunt language does the apostle describe the conclusion of the course pursued by the false prophets? 2 Peter 2:22.**

The apostolic indictment against those who were leading God's people astray concludes in verse 22 with two picturesque but withering judgments: (1) "the dog is turned to his own vomit again," and (2) "the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." Neither reproach is pleasant, but both are justified, for those who leave the way of sin to follow righteousness and then revert to the sinful, law-rejecting life are choosing on a moral level what dogs and pigs choose in their animal existence. Peter's blunt language must have led many first-century church members to serious thought and should do the same for us today.

**DAY 7 FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:**

**7**

*Responsibility of church leaders:* "The people will seldom rise higher than their minister. A world-loving spirit in him has a tremendous influence upon others. The people make his deficiencies an excuse to cover their world-loving spirit. They quiet their own consciences, thinking that they may be free to love the things of this life and be indifferent to spiri-

tual things, because their ministers are so. They deceive their own souls, and remain in friendship with the world, which the apostle declares to be enmity with God.

“Ministers should be examples to the flock. They should manifest an undying love for souls and the same devotion to the cause which they desire to see in the people.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 2, pp. 645, 646.

*For our twentieth century.* “It does our generation little credit that such passion [as Peter’s] for truth and holiness strikes an alien note in our minds. Peter’s plain speaking in this chapter [Second Peter 2] has a very practical purpose, just as Jesus’ warnings had: ‘What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch!’ We would be mistaken to assume, ‘It could never happen to us.’ Both Scripture and experience assure us that it could. . . . Covetousness, sophistical arguments, pride in knowledge, gluttony, drunkenness, lust, arrogance against authority of all kinds, and, most of all, the danger of denying the lordship of the Redeemer—are these not all the paramount temptations of money-mad, sex-mad, materialistic, anti-authoritarian, twentieth century man?”—Michael Green, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, vol. 18, p. 122.

“Self-righteousness is a curse, a human embellishment, which Satan uses for his glory. Those who garnish the soul with self-praise and flattery prepare the way for the seven other spirits more wicked than the first. In their very reception of the truth these souls deceive themselves. They are building upon a foundation of self-righteousness. The prayers of congregations may be offered to God with a round of ceremonies, but if they are offered in self-righteousness God is not honored by them. The Lord declares, ‘I will declare thy righteousness, and thy works; for they shall not profit thee.’ In spite of all their display, their garnished habitation, Satan comes in with a troop of evil angels and takes his place in the soul, to help in the deception. The apostle writes, ‘If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them’”—Ellen G. White Comments, *S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1093.

**SUMMARY:** When professed Christians turn back to their old life of sin, they give up true freedom in Christ to become slaves to sin once again. The fact is that their latter state is worse than their former one because once having apostatized it is more difficult to find freedom from sin in Christ again.

#### APPLICATION:

- Judging by the fruits I produce, what quality of tree does my life represent?
- Which of the sins that are uncovered in this week’s lesson cause me the most trouble?
- When did I last drink of the living water that only Christ can give?
- When spiritually thirsty people come to me for refreshment, how thoroughly and pleasantly is their thirst quenched?

# Reminders and Warnings

**THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** 2 Peter 3:1-7.

**DAY 1** **MEMORY TEXT:** "Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come" (1 Cor. 10:11).

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** No matter how unchangeable the course of human history may appear to be, the Christian places his confidence in prophetic forecasts and looks forward to the "last days" and Christ's return.

## OVERVIEW—2 Peter 3:1-7

Verses 1, 2 Words to Remember	Verses 3, 4 Scoffers Deny The Second Coming	Verses 5-7 What They Willingly Ignore
Remember the instruction given by prophets and apostles	As justification scoffers cite the supposed stability of nature	Judgment in the Flood Final fiery judgment

**INTRODUCTION:** In chapter 2 Peter forcefully expresses his righteous indignation against the immoral and deceptive teachers who would lead his flocks to spiritual ruin. In chapter 3 he readdresses himself to his central purpose—the strengthening of the believers' commitment to Christ. To this end, he develops the theme begun in his first chapter—spiritual growth in preparation for entrance "into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:11). Of course, there were no chapter divisions in the original letter. It was written as one continuous message.

We should embark on our study of the closing third of the epistle in an appreciative and respectful spirit. This final chapter stands head high with the best that the New Testament offers. We should prepare to find and digest Peter's counsel, whatever its message may be and whatever the Spirit may tell us through its verses.

### DAY I. SCORNFUL CRITICISM EXAMINED (2 Peter 3:1-4).

**2**

No matter how strong the Bible writers' language may have been in denouncing heresy and wrongdoing, their spirit is tender toward the innocent and faithful Christians whom they address. In this closing chapter of his second epistle, Peter uses the term "beloved" for his readers in four

places—here in verse 1 and in verses 8, 14, and 17. He follows each use with an exhortation, “by way of remembrance” (verse 1), “be not ignorant” (verse 8), “be diligent” (verse 14), and “beware” (verse 17).

**For what general purpose did the apostle write “this second epistle”?  
2 Peter 3:1.**

The purpose behind Peter’s second letter is identical with that which prompted his first. Although the word *both* is italicized in some editions of the King James Version to indicate that there is no word corresponding to it in the original, its inclusion is justified by the Greek construction. Peter wrote his first and second letters to remind his readers of the instruction that they had received already from the Scriptures and from apostolic teaching (verses 1, 2). He expected the church members to receive his reminder, for they had “pure minds,” or, more accurately, “the pure mind” or “the sincere mind.” The Greek word translated “pure” suggests “tested by the sun’s warmth.” Flaws in sculpture in those days often were patched by wax which would melt in sunlight. When unflawed works were described in Latin they were said to be *sine cera*, “without wax,” whence our word *sincere* or pure. The use of “pure” here testifies to Peter’s high regard for his readers. He believed them to be genuine Christians and encouraged them to measure up to his estimate of their characters.

**What two particular ends did the writer have in mind for his readers?  
2 Peter 3:2.**

The pastor first wanted to remind his readers of the “holy” prophets’ messages. This must refer to the Old Testament prophecies, particularly those that foretold the work of Christ and His coming. Then he wanted to remind them of the commandment or moral instruction given by “your apostles” rather than “us the apostles.” This wording delicately avoids any touch of arrogance on Peter’s part. He is but one among several authorities who had been appointed by “the Lord and Saviour” to serve the young churches and their members. Neither he nor the prophets nor the apostles laid claim to personal authority. They were only the Lord’s spokesmen, and His divine authority sufficed.

DAY

3

**How does Peter disclose the specific line of prophetic and apostolic teaching that is being attacked by the skeptics? 2 Peter 3:3, 4.**

The doubters’ principal attacks were directed against the doctrine of the second advent. “Where is the promise of his coming?” In view of this the writer gives the topic first place, saying, “Knowing this first,” and relating the skeptics’ subversive questions to “the last days.” The reference is to the days that were to pass between Christ’s ascension and His second coming. The continual hope of the disciples, their converts, and

their successors was for the speedy return of their Master. (For extended comment on the hope and the passage of time before its fulfillment, see *S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, pp. 630-633, "Additional Note on Romans 13.")

To Peter and his fellow believers Christ's return was an ever-living hope, based on their Lord's teachings (Matthew 24), His promise (John 14:3), and that of the angels at the ascension scene (Acts 1:11). But to the literal minded and the materialists, the passage of time brought doubt and severe erosion of faith in the certainty of Christ's return. Those whom Peter described as "scoffers" or "mockers" would be susceptible in a particular way to such doubts, for their spiritual integrity already had been weakened by their personal habits. They were the false teachers who were described so forcefully in chapter 2. They were attempting the impossible task of professing Christianity while indulging their fleshly appetites. They had no inner core of spiritual honesty on which to build a firm faith. They were materialists. Their spiritual capacity had been so weakened by persistent sin that they were incapable of exercising a childlike faith in the promises recorded in Scripture or in those that were passed on orally by the apostles.

**APPLICATION TO OUR TIME:** "Looking down through the ages to the close of time, Peter was inspired to outline conditions that would exist in the world just prior to the second coming of Christ. 'There shall come in the last days scoffers,' he wrote, 'walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.' But 'when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them.' 1 Thessalonians 5:3. Not all, however, would be ensnared by the enemy's devices. As the end of all things earthly should approach, there would be faithful ones able to discern the signs of the times. While a large number of professing believers would deny their faith by their works, there would be a remnant who would endure to the end."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 535, 536.

What significance do you see in the way that the scoffers expressed their doubts concerning the second coming? 2 Peter 3:4.

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The apostle must be quoting the type of question by which the false teachers revealed their skepticism about Christ's return. Their question, "Where is the promise of his coming?" is not concerned with the place in the Bible where a particular promise is recorded, but with the fulfillment of the many declarations that Jesus would come again. Because such a question is natural to human nature, and therefore valid, Peter had no quarrel with that aspect of their inquiry. His objection lay in the spirit in which their question was nurtured. It was negative, arising from their materialistic outlook, their scorn of the spiritual, their devotion to pleasure, their unrepentant sensuality.

The mockers' attitude has a certain plausibility arising from their appeal to nature. Their reference to "since the fathers fell asleep" may be to



the 30 post-resurrection years during which many prominent church leaders had died. It is more likely, however, that they are employing the New Testament term for the Old Testament “fathers” or patriarchs. (For examples see Acts 3:13; 5:30; 26:6; 28:25; Rom. 9:5; 15:8; 1 Cor. 10:1; Heb. 1:1.) Note also that the doubters employ the biblical term for death, “fell asleep.” They then appeal to the apparent unchangeability in nature—“all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.” The sun rises and sets each day, the moon’s phases reappear each month, the seasons follow with annual regularity. This cycle, they imply, will continue without interruption. Although using a similar rationale, these scoffers should not be identified with present-day evolutionists, for Peter indicates that they believed in Creation.

## DAY II. THE FLOOD AND THE FUTURE (2 Peter 3:5-7).



The wayward teachers have appealed to the apparent immutability of nature in an effort to pour scorn on hopes that God would intervene dramatically in human history by visibly sending His Son into the human arena a second time. Peter turns that approach back upon the dissidents by appealing to the irrefutable fact that global catastrophe once had stricken our world when the Flood occurred.

**How does Peter counter the argument concerning the uninterrupted course of human history? 2 Peter 3:5, 6.**

In view of the severe judgments contained in chapter 2, it is not surprising to find the apostle attacking the disturbers’ emphasis on the apparently uninterrupted continuance of history since the world was created. He accuses them of willfully ignoring creation’s dependence on the word of God. Some see in this a reference to the personal Word, the Son, by whom “all things were made” (John 1:3). Such a subtlety is unlikely in this context. The clearer reference is to God’s spoken word as the creative agent. (See Gen. 1:3, 6, 9; compare with Ps. 33:6, 9.) The Creator’s word sufficed to create the atmospheric heavens (the Greek word is in the plural) “of old” or “long ago.” By the same power the earth came into existence. The close reliance on Genesis 1 is clear. Our globe emerged from “the waters” (Gen. 1:2, 6, 7, 9, 10).

But the implication is that what can be done by that almighty word can also be undone by the same. He who created the earth “by the breath of his mouth” (Ps. 33:6) also told Noah that He would “bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh” apart from Noah and his family and selected animals (Gen. 6:17-19). Then comes the irony described in 2 Peter 3:6. There the first word, “whereby,” represents two words in the original that today we would translate “by which.” This may be reasonably seen as a reference to the creative word and the waters from which our world first appeared. The sad irony lies in the subsequent destruction by that same element, water, of most of the creation by which the Lord had clothed and populated the globe. As is so often the case in nature, its blessings also can bring catastrophe. The beneficent sun that so pleas-



antly wars can scorch also, and life-giving water also can drown and destroy. In the case we are considering, Peter's conclusion is terse—"the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished." Of course, it was human, animal, and vegetable life that "perished," not the globe itself.

**DAY**  
**5**

After reminding his readers of the Flood, Peter then turns to the prospect of a future cataclysmic judgment. What contrasting cleansing agent to that used in the Flood will God use in the final judgment, and why does He choose a different agent? 2 Peter 3:7; Gen. 9:15.

We may need to remind ourselves that the apostle still is considering "words" and their role in God's design for this world. (See verses 2 and 5.) The writer now asserts that "by the same word," that is, by God's word whether through the prophets and apostles (verse 2) or by direct speech at Creation (verse 5), the present heavens and the earth have been kept in store (verse 7). And for what purpose? They "are being kept" or "reserved" with a view to being cleansed by fire at judgment day. The description of the judgment he gives in verse 10 is not difficult for those who live in the atomic age to comprehend.

**SEARCH AND LEARN:** Study the following texts to discover more of what the Bible has to say about the final judgment as it develops a consistent picture of a fiery cleansing of our world:

Ps. 21:9	Nahum 1:5, 6
Ps. 50:3	Mal. 4:1
Ps. 97:3-5	Matt. 3:11, 12
Isa. 66:15, 16	

Judgment day, with its cleansing fires, will purify the earth that has been polluted by centuries of sinful conduct. But "the day of judgment" will specifically bring "perdition" to "ungodly men." The word translated

"perdition" is related to the verb rendered as "punished" in 2 Peter 3:6. Both words are associated with the thought of destruction, ruin, and even annihilation that will be the final fate of the ungodly. The author has used the same word in chapter 2, verses 1 and 3, where it is translated as "damnable," "destruction," and "damnation." Peter sees no indication that the false teachers will repent of their deceptive work. He sees them included among those who will suffer irreparable punishment. There is divine justice in such an end, for they are impious and godless (compare Jude 15, 18).

**THINK IT THROUGH:** How can those who reject God and work against Him and His purposes expect to share a sinless eternity with Him and those who have been redeemed from evil?

**DAY 6** **NOTE ON THE SECOND COMING:** Our study this week has brought us face to face with the biblical teaching about our Lord's return. We shall meet this glorious topic again during our remaining studies this quarter, but shall have less space for its detailed consideration. Therefore, before this week's study closes, we should dwell on some of its features that will not be touched on in our study of the remainder of Peter's third chapter.

1. *Its necessity.* No omnipotent Creator can permit a rebellious world to continue its career unchecked. Such a policy would perpetuate rebellion, weaken the Almighty's program, and ensure the continuance of sin with all its related cruelty, suffering, and death. Therefore it is necessary that sin's reign should end and God reign supreme. This can come to pass only through Christ's return and the subjection of all to God the Father (1 Cor. 15:24-28).

2. *Its certainty.* In the celestial timetable there never has been any doubt about the certainty of Christ's second advent. It has been foreseen and planned from eternity. It does not depend on human skills and is not to be frustrated by human frailties. Our slowness, our failures, even our apostasy can delay the fulfillment of the eternal purpose, but because all is foreseen by the Omniscient, the day of the Lord will come at the time the Lord has foreseen.

3. *Its proximity.* By the exercise of hindsight we can see how difficult it would have been for the Master to return at earlier points in history. The conditions for return were not fulfilled. The earth was not fully explored; the church had not developed its potential; not all sections of earth were open to evangelization; means of travel and communication were rudimentary. Much yet remains to be done, but the means are available. No less significant is the horrible negative—human beings now hold in their hands the means of worldwide destruction. The possibility of annihilation through nuclear destruction increases every passing year. Thus our safety lies in the proximity of the second coming (2 Peter 3:11-13).

4. *Its finality.* The war to end wars has been fought often but never has accomplished its objective. But when Christ shall come again to deliver His people He will accomplish His objective. He shall come at the right time. If there were a better time for Him to have come, the All-wise One would have chosen it. All who really wish to be saved, who prefer righteousness to sin, who trust in Christ and not in themselves for salvation

will be ready to say, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us" (Isa. 25:9). (See Rev. 22:17.)

**DAY 7 FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:**

**7**

"*Scoffers*. In Jude (verse 18) the same Greek word is rendered *mockers*. The word means those who deride, reproach, ridicule. There is usually in the word the idea of contempt, or malignity towards an object. Here the sense seems to be that they would treat with derision or contempt the predictions respecting the advent of the Saviour, and the end of the world. It would appear probable that there was a particular or definite class of men referred to; a class who would hold peculiar opinions, and who would urge plausible objections against the fulfillment of the predictions respecting the end of the world, and the second coming of the Saviour—for these are the points to which Peter particularly refers. . . . The eye of the apostle is evidently on a particular class of men, the special form of whose reproaches would be the ridicule of the doctrines that the Lord Jesus would return; that there would be a day of judgment; that the world would be consumed by fire, etc."—Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament*, vol. 10, p. 254.

*Antediluvian conditions repeated*. "The sins that called for vengeance upon the antediluvian world exist today. The fear of God is banished from the hearts of men, and His law is treated with indifference and contempt. The intense worldliness of that generation is equaled by that of the generation now living. . . .

"That which is lawful in itself is carried to excess. Appetite is indulged without restraint. Professed followers of Christ are today eating and drinking with the drunken, while their names stand in honored church records. Intemperance benumbs the moral and spiritual powers and prepares the way for the indulgence of the lower passions. Multitudes feel under no moral obligation to curb their sensual desires, and they become the slaves of lust. Men are living for the pleasures of sense; for this world and this life alone."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 101, 102.

**SUMMARY:** In chapter 1, Peter wrote about "exceeding great and precious promises" (verse 14). In chapter 3 he centers the attention of his readers on the greatest and most precious of them all—Christ's promise to return and undo the damage done by sin. Apparently, the false teachers had been scoffing at this promise in particular, but Peter testifies to its certainty. His witness means much to those waiting eagerly for Christ's return today.

**APPLICATION:**

- In what ways has my mind been stirred this week to recall the words of the prophets and apostles concerning Christ's return?
- What influence, if any, do scoffers in A.D. 1985 have upon my confidence in the second coming?
- As I think of the prime features of our Lord's return—its majesty, its demonstration of divine reliability, its note of triumph over evil, its assurance of salvation—which of these, or other features, holds most significance for me?

# God's Timetable

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 2 Peter 3:8-10.

**DAY 1** **MEMORY TEXT:** "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** It behooves us to be more deeply aware of the nature and character of Him "with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13). Our salvation is closely linked to our personal acquaintance with God and our knowledge of His character (John 17:3).

## OVERVIEW—2 Peter 3:8-10

Verse 8	Verse 9	Verse 10
God and Time	God and Mercy	God and the Future

**INTRODUCTION:** In common with most human beings, the early Christians and those who were trying to lead them astray had inadequate ideas about the One whom they professed to worship. They observed some of the rudiments of adoration, but, as is true of most of us, their perceptions of God's eternal and loving nature were limited and distorted. They needed to get clearer visions of the Almighty. Peter determined to help them meet that need.

To that end he contrasted humanity's relation to time with that of the Lord's (2 Peter 3:8). That in itself provided an effective argument to counter the skepticism about Christ's return (verse 4). He repudiated the charge that God is unconcerned about the human race, and emphasized God's desire "that all should come to repentance" (verse 9). But, knowing those whom he was trying to help as well as those whose teachings he rejected, he found it necessary to warn both parties that the Lord's coming would be unexpected and cataclysmic (verse 10).

The apostle's careful attention to these questions that were troubling his readers has been helpful to Christians throughout succeeding ages. It should prove useful to us particularly in this time of worldwide distress and fear. We should study Peter's instruction earnestly, for it reveals much that will enable us to overcome doubt and to confirm the certainty of the advent.

## DAY I. GOD AND TIME (2 Peter 3:8).

2

The pastor-spirit in Peter was deeply concerned over the impact that unscriptural and unspiritual teaching was having on the congregations to whom he was writing. This led him to expose the skeptical and secular nature of the teachers who had been professing to interpret Scripture to the church members. It prompts him at this point in his epistle to defend the Lord's dealings with humanity, both in the past and in the days to come. He shares his concern in a most gentle manner, employing his favorite form of address, "beloved." He asks his readers to pause and consider the apparent delay in their Lord's appearing in the light of God's eternal nature. This surely was a wise approach. We easily can be misled by listening to human reasoning when we would be wiser to consider the Godhead's outlook on any problem that disturbs us. This is Peter's response to the heretical suggestions that are worrying his flock. He applies his remedy earnestly and clearly, as a careful study of verse 8 reveals.

**What universal principle lies behind the observation Peter makes in his reasoned response to the doubters' negative outlook on Christ's return? 2 Peter 3:8.**

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The persuasiveness of Peter's exhortation, "be not ignorant of this one thing," is better expressed in the paraphrase "let not this one fact escape your attention." Who could resist such a plea? Not Peter's readers, we may be sure.

**THINK IT THROUGH: Do we have a responsibility to be informed, not to be ignorant, and not to neglect vital information, particularly when it concerns the nature and the character of God?**

To God the Father and God the Son there is no time as we know it with its restrictions and pressures. They are independent of time. In the light of this understanding, Peter can confidently make the significant observation: "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." Understanding this truth concerning the divine nature has an important bearing on our attitude toward the passage of time in relation to the second coming. As were the members of the early church, we are impatient for our Lord's return. And this is by no means to be condemned. Before the close of the first century, John the revelator was recording: "Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20). Such is the natural prayer of the dedicated heart. There is something wrong when we feel no interest in our Master's speedy appearing. But Peter reminds his readers of the difference between their view of time and the way the Lord relates to what we know as "time." His use of the comparison between one day and a thousand years does not imply a difference of one day as against the passage of 365,000 days (which no ordinary human being has experienced). It rather suggests the intensity of the Eternal's understanding of each day's significance. The illustrations also emphasize that the Almighty does not need to measure the passage

of days, years, centuries, and millenniums. He lives in an eternal present.

The psalmist expresses this in a picturesque way when he says, "A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night" (Ps. 90:4). (Compare Isa. 55:8, 9.) Such revelations remind us that no matter how dedicated we are to the pursuit of a saving knowledge of God, a complete understanding of the divine nature eludes us because of our human limitations. That realization need not distress us. Eternity will be long enough for us to increase our knowledge. In the meantime, we must resist the temptation to attempt to create God in our own image.

## DAY II. GOD AND MERCY (2 Peter 3:9).

### 3

The answers to many questions that perplex us lie in a deep understanding of the mind of God. The more we understand His character, the better we shall understand His ways. Peter had known this for decades, and he uses that knowledge to help his troubled congregations understand more about the apparent delay in their Lord's return.

**What divine characteristics help explain the fact that the Lord has not returned as yet? 2 Peter 3:9.**

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"The Lord is not slack," declares the apostle, or as J. B. Phillips renders the phrase, "It is not that he is dilatory." That is a heartening and necessary assurance, especially for impetuous Peter and his impetuous successors. God is not subject to human weaknesses, as some would reckon Him to be. His "purposes know no haste and no delay."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 32. (Compare Hab. 2:3.)

But that fact has by no means been easy for many of God's children to accept. At critical junctures in history there have been long periods of waiting that have been difficult for even the most trustful believers to explain. Abraham was 75 years old when he obeyed the Lord and left Haran in route to Canaan. He carried with him the promise of being the founder of "a great nation," yet had to wait 25 years before his promised son was born. (See Gen. 12:1-4; 21:5.) He could not then foresee the centuries that would lapse before his descendants would become even a small nation. They would first have to move into pagan Egypt, prosper, and then be enslaved by a pharaoh who did not know Joseph, to say nothing of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Then came the first 80 years of Moses' life before deliverance by the Exodus, with 40 more years of wilderness wandering before his people possessed the land that had been promised to Abraham.

As we review the subsequent checkered history of the chosen people, we see a host of them exiled in Babylon for 70 years. Just a few returned from Persia to Judea with Ezra. There was further waiting until Nehemiah led his countrymen back to Jerusalem from Persia. And, overshadowing all, we see the 4000-year wait from Eden to Bethlehem for the Messiah.

By bearing in mind such waiting we shall better understand our Lord's "longsuffering," and be conscious of our need for patience as we wait for

His return. We may conclude then that what God foresees to be best He will fulfill, and that He longs for His Son's return to occur to put an end to sin and to usher in everlasting righteousness (Dan. 9:24). "The promise," rather than "his promise," clearly refers back to verse 4 where the doubters ask, "Where is the promise of his coming?" Peter covers their arguments conscientiously and makes a reasoned approach to their skepticism.

After defending the Eternal against the charge of delay, the apostle then turns to a positive evaluation of the divine character. He introduces his appraisal with a strong word for "but" which suggests "on the other hand," or "to the contrary," utterly repudiating any idea of God being lax in His dealings with humanity. He then uses one of the Bible's great words—"longsuffering," a composite term that originally linked the thought "of long duration" with "the soul" or "passion." It then came to signify "great in patience," or "longsuffering."

**DAY 4 SEARCH AND LEARN:** In the texts listed below discover how prominently the quality of long-suffering figures in the listings of our Maker's attributes:

Ex. 34:6

Ps. 86:15

Num. 14:18

Rom. 9:20-24

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The usage of this term in Second Peter brings Christians face to face with the Lord's long-suffering toward themselves. In this way Peter not only answered the mockers but brought reassurance to the faithful. And his words still can do the same for us. We should never forget: "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed" (Lam. 3:22).

The most dastardly lie in the universe is that God is indifferent to His creations's welfare. He is "not willing," that is, He does not even wish "that any should perish." "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked" (Eze. 33:11). This saving desire on God's part does not refer just to the first or physical death, although that also must be included because death is repellent to Him who is Life. The more significant reference is to the "second death," for the word translated "perish" refers to utter destruction.

**What is the Creator's will for all who live on earth? 2 Peter 3:9.**

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For the second time in this sentence the emphatic "but" is used to show the strong contrast between the preceding clause with its "perish" and the following clause with its emphasis on repentance and salvation. He who made man and woman in the beginning does not want any of His creatures to be lost. He wants all to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). Those who have turned from Him He invites to turn again and find pardon and salvation (Lam. 3:31-33; Eze. 18:32; Micah 7:18, 19). If the Lord had His way, all would repent and be saved. But because the human race has the privi-



lege and the weighty responsibility of free exercise of the will, unnumbered multitudes choose the way of death instead of the path of life.

The insights contained in 2 Peter 3:9 throw light on many moral issues that perplex earnest Christians. This text also contributes to our understanding of divine justice. How can a loving God allow His creatures to be lost? God wants all human beings to be saved and is exceedingly patient in giving them time for repentance and for returning to Him in contrition. Such considerations make this verse worthy of memorization and deep meditation. It will richly repay any effort expended upon it. When embedded in the mind it can illumine many a troublesome question and enable us to keep a balanced picture of the Father of mercies whom we serve and in whom we believe.

**COMPARE 2 Peter 3:9 with Paul's paean of praise in Romans 11:33-36. Notice how doing so provides us with an inspiring revelation of the mind of Him with whom we have to do.**

### DAY III. GOD AND THE FUTURE (2 Peter 3:10).

5

Peter's second epistle has been turning false teaching and even skeptical questions to good account. It has used the destructive doubts of the scoffers as opportunities for teaching men and women essential truths about God (3:8, 9). This provides an illustration of how the word causes even the wrath of men to praise Him.

**On which prominent aspect of his Master's return does Peter now focus his readers' attention, and why does he give it this emphasis? 2 Peter 3:10.**

There can be no reasonable doubt as to the events on which the apostle's mind is set. "The day of the Lord" is a widely used scriptural term that enshrines all that God's people expect at the consummation of all things. It covers a wide range of expectations and does not merely refer to a 24-hour day but rather to that space of time in which God will accomplish all that is needed to inaugurate sinless eternity. (See Isa. 13:6; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 31; Zeph. 1:14; Mal. 4:1.) In our study of this passage of Scripture there is little room for doubt about the identity of "the day of the Lord," for Peter clearly refers to words from his Lord's own lips as Jesus foretold conditions that will herald His return. The Gospels give prominence to the Saviour's emphasis on the unexpectedness of His appearing. (See Matt. 24:42-44; Mark 13:33-37; Luke 12:34-37; 21:34-36.) Jesus stated that His arrival will be as unexpected as a thief's entry into an unsuspecting household. It therefore seems most appropriate that His disciple should phrase his warning in similar terms, "as a thief."

In the passage we are studying (3:10) the word for "will come" is placed first in the sentence in the original Greek, emphasizing that the Saviour will return in spite of all that false teachers might declare. Nowhere does the writer try to set a time for his Lord's advent.

**NOTE: It probably was Peter who informed Mark of the Master's teaching concerning the time of His return. Read Mark 13:32.**

But the personal message is the same as when Jesus instructed the disciples, "Be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Matt. 24:44). If only we knew *when* our Lord would return, how well prepared we would be! But the Saviour knew that long years of waiting lay ahead and that human nature would put off preparatory work until it would be too late. Then, the unprepared would be taken unawares and be lost at His coming. Therefore He says, "Be ye also ready."

**DAY 6** What dramatic cosmic events does Peter foresee as accompanying the second advent? 2 Peter 3:10.

The apostle is not hewing his own path into the unseen future. He is rather summarizing, in apocalyptic language, what other prophets, including Jesus, had firmly foretold.

**SEARCH AND LEARN:** Some of the prophecies Peter most likely was summarizing follow. Read as many from the following list as you can:

Ps. 50:3	Isa. 64:1-4	2 Thess. 1:6-10
Ps. 97:5, 6	Isa. 66:15, 16	Jude 14
Isa. 13:9-13	Matt. 24:30, 31	Rev. 6:12-17
Isa. 34:4	Luke 21:25-27	

These revelations are based upon the nature of divinity—its purity, glory, and power. We need to stamp upon our minds the awe-inspiring glimpses of the Godhead that are unveiled in such texts as Daniel 7:9, 10; Habakkuk 3:3-6; and Hebrews 12:29. When this is done, we will be able to conceive more fully the burning radiance that will fill every corner of the universe as the Son of man comes "with power and great glory."

As our twentieth century draws to its close, it is not unnatural for us to read into the remainder of verse 10 a reference to nuclear destruction. Of course, Peter had no inkling of such. He here endeavors to convey the awe-inspiring majesty of "the day of the Lord." Fulfillment of the scriptures listed in the preceding "Search and Learn" exercise is sufficient to account for the convulsions that will accompany the appearing of the King of kings and Lord of lords, and the apostle simply uses the most vivid words at his command to portray that "grand and awful time."

The Greek word translated "with a great noise" occurs only here in the New Testament and may well refer to the crackle and roar of flames, in which case it is linked to verse 7 where Peter states that "the heavens and the earth . . . are . . . reserved unto fire against the day of judgment." The meaning of the word translated "elements" is not clear. Probably "Peter here speaks of the physical elements of which our world is composed, matter that will 'melt' under the cleansing fires of the last day."—*S.D.A. Bible Commentary* vol. 7, p. 616.

The final clause of verse 10, "the earth . . . burned up," may be translated in several ways, due to some uncertainty about the original reading. An acceptable alternative reads, "the earth with all that is in it will be laid

bare" (NEB). The end result is the same—devastation and the preparation of the way for "new heavens and a new earth" (verse 13).

#### DAY FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:

7

*God and time.* Peter replies to "Where is the promise of his coming?" with the law of contrast. "In effect he says that we must never confuse time with eternity, the time of man with the time of God. God sees time quite differently from man. Man's outlook is limited. With God there is no 'long' or 'short' time. With Him *a thousand years* are as *one day*. The real things are not measured by time; God's holy purposes do not follow a time schedule. Relativity is now a commonly accepted concept. A sufferer finds time long on his hands; a lover finds time short. [An apparent] delay on God's part in the fulfilling of his purposes must not be regarded as unconcern for its fulfillment (vs. 9)."—*The Interpreter's Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), vol. 12, p. 198.

*God's infinity.* "Man has but a short time to live, and if he does not accomplish his purposes in a very brief period, he never will. But it is not so with God. He always lives; and we cannot therefore infer, because the execution of his purposes seems to be delayed, that they are abandoned. With him who always lives it will be as easy to accomplish them in a far distant period as now. If it is his pleasure to accomplish them in a single day, he can do it; if he chooses that the execution shall be deferred to a thousand years, or that a thousand years shall be consumed in executing them, he has power to carry them onward through what seems to us to be so vast a duration. The wicked, therefore, cannot infer that they will escape because their punishment is delayed: nor should the righteous fear that the Divine promises will fail because ages pass away before they are accomplished."—Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament*. vol. 10, p. 259.

See also *The Great Controversy*, "The Controversy Ended," pp. 671 to 673.

**SUMMARY:** Peter vividly but briefly portrays the events connected with Christ's return and the final judgment, pointing out that God's long-suffering and mercy have prevented up until now earth's fiery conclusion. But, because mercy holds back the final destruction, we should not scoff at the Bible's predictions. Christ *will* return and "the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Peter 3:10).

#### APPLICATION:

- How should I relate to the difference between God's sense of time and my own?
- If the Eternal is not willing that any should perish, how should I relate to those who spurn my efforts to bring them to repentance?
- How conscious have I been of the Lord's long-suffering toward me? How can I more effectively show my gratitude to Him?

#### NOTES:

# “What Manner of Persons?”

**THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** 2 Peter 3:11-16.

**DAY 1** **MEMORY TEXT:** “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless” (2 Peter 3:14).

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** Belief in Christ's second coming is worthless unless it inspires us to Christlike living.

## OVERVIEW—2 Peter 3:11-16

Verses 11, 12	Verses 13, 14	Verses 15, 16
Preparing for the Day of God	Promise of a New Earth	Paul's Supporting Testimony

**INTRODUCTION:** The immediate purpose for the writing of the Second Epistle of Peter was to warn of the destructive activity of the apostate teachers. But, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Peter did not wish to conclude his letter on a negative note. Instead he chose to close with high quality spiritual counsel.

Peter's exhortations are inspired by his visions concerning his Master's return and the events that will bring human history to its close (verse 10). No thoughtful believer can contemplate the prospective fiery drama without being moved to awe and fear. Atmospheric explosions, solids reduced to molten masses, and the earth's surface broken up and denuded of its natural coverings—the description of the coming catastrophe could bring even the careless to their knees. And those who first read or heard the apostles's words were far from thoughtless. In the midst of paganism they had heard the gospel preached and had bravely accepted its challenge, in spite of the fact that their new-found belief might cost them their lives. Even such believers must determine to live worthily that they might escape the destruction that accompanies the close of human probation. To encourage them in this high resolve Peter now exhorts them to examine their conduct and to mold it to New Testament ideals.

Such counsel is most appropriate to those who live much closer to their Lord's return than did Peter's first readers. Each generation needs to face the truth that is framed in Paul's words to Roman Christians: “For now is our salvation nearer than when we believed” (Rom. 13:11). Beyond dispute is the fact that in 1985 we are closer to the end than we have ever

been. We need to fashion our lives in the light of that recognition. Peter's graphic description of "last things" will help us discharge that responsibility.

**DAY I. PREPARING FOR THE DAY OF GOD (2 Peter 3:11, 12).****2**

The Bible was not written as a morally neutral history book. Its historical passages are built into a system of morality that makes historical persons accountable for their acts. The same is true of its prophetic portions. They are not mere foretellers of future events; they are involved deeply in moral judgments. Their ultimate objective is the relation of deeds to divine intentions for individuals and for the entire universe. We find those principles operating in Peter's second letter.

**What do you understand to be the point of the searching question with which the apostle summarizes the significance of his portrayal of events associated with "the day of the Lord"? 2 Peter 3:11.**

---

Having evaluated the certainty of divine intervention in history as it relates to human kind, and having repeated the substance of his Master's declaration that "ye know not what hour your Lord doth come" (Matt. 24:42-44), the apostle proceeds to make an acute personal application of that foreseen event. He faces his readers and us with the stark question: "What manner of persons ought ye to be?" We cannot stay the winds and the waves; we cannot prevent earthquakes; we cannot extinguish raging infernos as disintegration begins. Our part in the drama consists in having a right relationship with God. When we relate to Him as we should His moral standards will be engraved firmly on our hearts.

For unassailable reasons our Maker has decided that only "he that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart" shall dwell in His holy hill (Ps. 15:1, 2). "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; . . . and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil" (Isa. 33:14, 15). Such uprightness is essential for a sinless eternity.

The requirements are summarized in Peter's reference to "holy conversation and godliness" where the word translated "conversation" is better rendered as "behavior" or "conduct." "Godliness" includes "piety" and "religion" and is used only by Peter (2 Peter 1:3, 6, 7) and by Paul in the pastoral epistles to Timothy and Titus. The apostle is therefore reminding his readers to develop a genuine Christian character and life-style that will prepare them to meet their Saviour unashamedly. An enriching thought is injected into Peter's admonition when we note that the original words for "conversation" and "godliness" are both in the plural. Their manifestation in a Christian's life cannot be limited.

DAY  
3

In what two specific ways can we hasten the return of Christ? How are we reminded once again of the fiery overthrow of the atmospheric heavens and the earth? 2 Peter 3:12.

Because holy conduct and piety are personal qualities, they do not cover a Christian's total duty to God and humanity. In verse 12 two extensions of duty are emphasized, being expressed somewhat obscurely in the King James Version as "looking for and hasting unto the coming." "Looking for" represents the eager watching for Christ's coming, while "hasting unto" becomes more meaningful when seen as "hastening on"—that is, "causing the day of the Lord to come more quickly by helping to fulfill those conditions without which it cannot come." (Trench, on 'The Authorized Version of the New Testament').—Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969), vol. 1, p. 707.

To which we must add the outreach of active witness, the preaching of the gospel into all the world, "and then shall the end come" (Matt. 24:14).

The "day of God" clearly is the same as the "day of the Lord" (2 Peter 3:10), and probably embraces all the end-of-the-world events that are foretold in the Old and New Testaments. It is significant that the apostle uses the advent word *parousia*, the special New Testament word for "coming," and then emphasizes its dramatic nature by again referring to the fire which will "dissolve" the heavens or cause them to disintegrate (as in verse 10).

Then comes a stronger word for "melt" than that which was used in verse 10. It implies that "the elements" will be liquified. The picture that Peter paints is vivid. He uses it as encouragement for us to be well prepared for the Son of man's return. We know "what manner of persons" we *ought* to be. The object of his teaching is to help each one of us to become such persons.

DAY  
4

## II. PROMISE OF A NEW EARTH (2 Peter 3:13).

The apostle has not passed lightly over the distressing events that precede Christ's return. He has described them in clear language (verses 10-12). He now turns to the prospect that will compensate the Redeemer and the redeemed for all the distress that has gone before.

**On what basis can the Christian look for a new universal order? 2 Peter 3:13.**

Peter's more than 30 years of ministry since the ascension has been built on divine promises. (See Acts 1:8; 2:15-21, 33, 39 and throughout the early chapters of the book of Acts.) In this epistle he is relying still on the fulfillment of such promises (1:4; 3:9, 10). He now directs his readers' attention to predictions that speak of "new heavens and a new earth." The primary reference must be to the prophecies given through Isaiah (11:4-9; 65:17-25; 66:22, 23), Jeremiah (23:5-8; 33:15, 16), and Daniel

(2:44), together with Jesus' own sayings concerning the kingdom (for example, Matt. 6:10; 25:31-34). To Peter these would be the "more sure word of prophecy" (2 Peter 1:19). They are reliable; underwritten by God, His Son, and His Spirit.

The Greek word that he used for "new" with both "heavens" and "earth" refers to that which is new in quality, or different, in contrast to the old heavens and earth which have been spoiled by sin. (Compare with Rev. 21:1 where the same word also is used with "a new heaven and a new earth.") The "new heavens" hardly can be God's own dwelling place, but rather the term must apply to the atmospheric heavens around our earth that also have been polluted by sin. They will need renewal even as does the earth that has been defiled by millenniums of wrongdoing.

The quality of life in the "new heavens and a new earth" is guaranteed by the assurance that in them "dwelleth righteousness." And that act of dwelling is to be permanent, for Peter uses a specific word that suggests "making a home in," even as Paul does in Ephesians 3:17 where he writes of Christ's making "His home in your hearts through your faith" (Weymouth's translation). "There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth," says John (Rev. 21:27), speaking of the New Jerusalem. That answers the question, "What manner of persons?"

**When viewing the prospects of new heavens and a new earth, what did Peter perceive to be of greatest importance? 2 Peter 3:14.**

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Again, the warmhearted leader addressed his readers as "beloved." Such apostolic affection added persuasive power to his admonition which is based on their common hope of Christ's return and the new life it will bring to all that love His appearing. But, as the writer pointed out, waiting for the advent is not enough. There must also be preparation on the part of those who wait. "Wherefore" or "therefore," because they "look for such things" or, better, eagerly anticipate "these things" that have been set out in verses 8 to 13, they need to be prepared for their arrival. To this end Peter used another of his key injunctions, "be diligent" to indicate the need for careful preparation.

**DAY 5 COMPARE:** Chapter 1, verses 5, 10, and 15, where Peter also exhorts the readers to diligence.

Peter's exhortation has a high end in view. He wants the Redeemer/Judge to find His people "without spot and blameless" and, as a consequence, at peace with Him. This is no new standard. It is the New Testament expectation. Those who are diligent spiritually may, by the grace of Christ and the Spirit's power, make that preparation and enjoy the assurance of being prepared for Christ's return.

The affectionate exhortation conveyed in verse 14 raises a question concerning the means whereby we become fit for heaven and its sinless company. We are urged to "be diligent," which calls for an effort on our part. Does that mean that our fitness for heaven depends on our own efforts? Is there a hint of "salvation by works" in the apostle's words? No,

there is not. But we must allow Christ to do what He wants to do in and for us.

**SEARCH AND LEARN:** Consider how each of the five scriptures listed below throws light on the question of whether we are saved by works or by grace:

1 Cor. 1:7, 8

1 Thess. 5:23

Phil. 1:10, 11

1 John 2:28

Phil. 2:13-15

In 1 Corinthians 1:7, 8 we discover that it is "our Lord Jesus Christ" who enables us to become "blameless." In Philippians 1:10, 11 the standard to be reached is attained "by Jesus Christ" and in Philippians 2:13, by "God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." First Thessalonians 5:23 contains a prayer that "the very God of peace" might sanctify us completely; while 1 John 2:28 counsels us to "abide in him," that is, Jesus, so that we shall "not be ashamed before him at his coming." We need to *desire* holiness, but such desires will never be fulfilled until we allow divine power, brought to us by the Holy Spirit, to raise us above ourselves, to enable us to abide in Christ, to direct our minds in thinking His thoughts after Him, and to help us climb the ladder of spiritual growth that we studied in Lesson 2.

Concerning the words "abide in him" in 1 John 2:28 the following comment can be helpful. "In the process of bringing salvation to the hearts of men God is ever the first! . . . By his Spirit he invades the heart of the sinner. Thus the sinner, who has now become, in principle, a saint, has received power to abide in Christ. The more he does so, the more he will experience Christ's loving presence . . . , but the responsibility of abiding in Christ is placed squarely upon man's shoulders, exactly where it belongs. Without exertion there is no salvation. But the power to exert oneself and to persevere is God-given!"—William Hendriksen, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, vol. 2 (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1964), p. 299.

DAY  
6

### III. PAUL'S SUPPORTING TESTIMONY (2 Peter 3:15, 16).

The title "our beloved brother Paul" raises no difficulties in this context. The book of Acts and the Pauline epistles reveal the deep affection in which the great apostle was held. The adjective "beloved" would then be justified totally and used sincerely. Paul recorded that he had opposed Peter on the question of ritual separation of Jewish Christians from Gentile believers at Antioch (Gal. 2:11-14), but that was an honest difference of opinion, and it prevented neither of the two apostles from giving honor to the other.

And about "the wisdom given unto him" (Paul) there could be no doubt. It is one of the many evidences of the inspiration that produced his writings. If Peter was crucified about the same time that Paul was beheaded, this passage reveals that the latter's epistles were circulating among scattered Christian communities during the early sixties of the first century. From Colossians 4:16 it also is safe to deduce that each epis-



tle helped more churches than the one to which it was addressed originally. The first church to receive a letter probably had copies made for the benefit of other congregations. In that way a greater number of believers were edified. By his reference to "the other scriptures" (2 Peter 3:16) Peter indicates that the early church had accepted Paul's letters as inspired and had begun to lay the groundwork for the sacred canon of the New Testament.

The above considerations enlarge our view of church life in Asia Minor, and beyond, during the early decades after Christ's ascension. Although in most cases the groups of believers were scattered, they communicated with each other. More interestingly still, it is possible to see Peter and Paul both working in that large geographical area with both contributing to the faith and works of congregations in which each was particularly interested. We might wonder if the paths of the two missionaries often crossed, and where, before the leaders' martyrdoms in Rome between A.D. 66-68.

**What are "these things" (verse 16) in Paul's writings that Peter finds difficult to understand?**

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The context of verses 15 and 16 is clearly Peter's extended discussion of the second coming (verses 8-14). Should the search be widened, it may include the whole epistle, but that is scarcely needed, although Paul's voluminous letters certainly covered most of the ground traversed by Peter in this epistle. However, the main thrust of the reference to Paul's epistles concerns "some things hard to be understood" that have been twisted by the "unlearned and unstable" (verse 16). The Greek word for "unlearned" is the opposite of the Greek word for learner or disciple. The word translated "unstable" refers to those who have no support. It is easy for such people to "wrest" or twist the Scriptures. The original word for "wrest" referred to torture on the rack when a victim's limbs were twisted or dislocated—a most vivid and painful picture of distortion of truth.

Few Bible students will quarrel with Peter's comment on Paul's epistles, "in which are some things hard to be understood." Indeed, the casual Bible reader might describe it as an understatement, while the earnest student will agree as to its truth. But the difficulties in those epistles largely arise from the magnitude of the subjects with which they deal as well as with Paul's involved sentence structure. A finite being, although inspired, is struggling to grasp infinity; a human is seeking to explain the divine; a mortal is trying to describe the immortal; a time-bound mind is grappling with the nature of the eternal. It is not surprising that we who work on lower planes should find it difficult to follow the workings of a mastermind such as Paul's. When the inspiration factor is added we must expect our mental and spiritual capacities to be stretched beyond their normal limits. We should welcome the challenge and cheerfully engage in the spiritual exercise of studying "the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2:10) with the aid of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13). Some of us engage all too little in such exercise.

DAY  
7

**FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:** For graphic descriptions of cosmic upheaval preceding Christ's return read *The Great Controversy*, pages 636 to 638; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pages 109, 110; and the Ellen G. White Comments, *S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, volume 7, page 946 (if available).

*The second coming and Christian behavior.* "The expectation of the Lord's return always inspires Christians to a holy life. (Compare 1 John 2:28). Disbelief in the Lord's return all too often produces indifferentism in behavior, as it had with these errorists [in Second Peter 2 and 3]. There is an indissoluble link between conduct and conviction. Barclay gives three superb examples from heathen tombs of what happens when men reject the theological view of history, the belief that creation has a goal, a climax, which is one of the main themes of the doctrine of the advent. It leads to *hedonism*: 'I was nothing; I am nothing; so thou who art still alive, eat, drink, and be merry.' It leads to *apathy*: 'Once I had no existence; now I have none. I am not aware of it. It does not concern me.' It leads, finally, to *despair*: 'Charidas, what is below?' "Deep darkness." "But what of the paths upward?" "All a lie" . . . "Then we are lost." ' Barclay concludes, rightly, that without the truth, embodied in the second coming doctrine, that life is going somewhere, there is nothing left to live for."—Michael Green, *New Testament Commentaries* vol. 18, p. 139.

"The day and the hour of His coming Christ has not revealed. He stated plainly to His disciples that He Himself could not make known the day or the hour of His second appearing. Had He been at liberty to reveal this, why need He have exhorted them to maintain an attitude of constant expectancy? There are those who claim to know the very day and hour of our Lord's appearing. Very earnest are they in mapping out the future. But the Lord has warned them off the ground they occupy. The exact time of the second coming of the Son of man is God's mystery,"—*The Desire of Ages*. p. 632.

**SUMMARY:** Peter not only warns his readers about the coming judgment and the destruction of the world, but he instructs them how to prepare for it and urges them to do so. His counsel should inspire his modern readers to Christlike living and to the urgency of preparing those about us for what is coming.

#### APPLICATION:

- How expectant am I concerning the second coming? Has what seems to have been a delay in Christ's coming been reflected in any way in my life-style?
- In addition to "looking for" my Master's return, how actively am I "hastening on" His appearing? What am I doing to help others prepare for His coming?
- If Jesus should return at the end of this quarter, or if I should die, will I truly be ready to meet Him "in peace"?
- Apart from the study of this lesson, how much Bible study have I done this week? What message did I get from it?

## Introduction to the Book of Jude

Alarmed by news of the havoc being wrought by false teachers in the church, Jude, "the brother of James" (verse 1), wrote a brief epistle designed to unmask false teachings and to urge his readers to a bold defense of the faith. Jude is known as a "catholic" or "general epistle" because it does not specify any individual or church as its recipient. The similarity of this epistle to that of Second Peter indicates that it was written in the latter half of the first century, probably to the same group of churches to which Peter wrote.

The epistle concludes with a series of exhortations: *Remember* the words spoken by the apostles (verse 17), *remain* in the love of God (verse 21), and *remove* those in danger of the fires of judgment from the fate awaiting the unsaved (verse 23). These exhortations are followed by a glorious doxology that praises God for His ability to keep His followers from falling into Satan's traps.

	<b>JUDE OUTLINED</b>
Verses 1-4	Introduction: Fight for your faith
Verses 5-7	Remember God's judgments
Verses 8-13	False teachers unmasked
Verses 14-16	Their doom prophesied
Verses 17-23	Exhortation (warning) to remember, remain and remove
Verses 24, 25	Doxology: God is able to keep you

# "Put You in Remembrance"

**THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Jude 1-25.

**DAY MEMORY TEXT:** "Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Jude 21).

**1**

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** In this short book of only 25 verses, Jude unmasks the false teachers in the church and urges his readers to a bold defense of the faith and to concentrate on preparing to meet the Lord.

## OUTLINE:

- I. Authorship and background.
- II. False teachers unmasked (verses 1-11).
- III. Five metaphors characterize the false teachers (verses 12, 13).
- IV. Their certain doom prophesied (verses 14-16).
- V. Exhortation to the believers (verses 17-25).

**INTRODUCTION:** By comparing Jude 4 through 18 with 2 Peter 2:1 through 3:3 we discover that much of Jude's material also is found in Second Peter. "Not only the same thoughts, but in many instances the same words are used, with some words quite unusual. Did Jude borrow from 2 Peter, Peter from Jude, or did they both borrow from a common but unknown source? This question cannot be answered with finality. Most Biblical scholars think that Jude is the earlier of the two letters, since it would be difficult to explain why Jude would write a letter at all if he had little to say beyond what was already well expressed in 2 Peter. These scholars assert that it is easy to explain how Peter might have used thoughts expressed in Jude's brief epistle, and then have added material to it. Literary studies show that the shorter of two similar works is usually the earlier. However, a minority of scholars defends the priority of 2 Peter over that of Jude. Among the reasons set forth are the following: (1) 2 Peter 2:1 speaks of the future appearance of false teachers whereas Jude gives the impression that these teachers are already at work (Jude 4). (2) Jude speaks of the warning about the coming of skeptics as being in the past (vs. 17, 18), whereas Peter utters a current warning (2 Peter 3:3).

"The arguments on either side are not sufficiently decisive to determine which of the two epistles, Jude or 2 Peter, was the earlier. . . . For this reason it is impossible to date Jude's letter. If written before 2 Peter it must have been composed before A.D. 67, the probable year of Peter's death . . . ; if Jude followed 2 Peter, it may have been written between the years A.D. 70 and 85.

“. . . From v. 3 it would appear that the author intended to write a regular pastoral epistle to confirm the believers in their Christian faith, but news of the havoc being wrought by libertine teachers led him, under the guidance of the Divine Spirit, to change his original plan and to urge his readers to a bold defense of the faith. . . . For an understanding of the contents of the epistle frequent reference to and comparison with 2 Peter is necessary.”—*S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 701, 702.

**DAY**  
**2****I. AUTHORSHIP AND BACKGROUND (verses 1-11).**

Although 2 Peter and Jude cover much of the same material and use similar language, Jude's individuality, personality, and way of thinking still shine through:

**What gives us a clue as to which of the several Judes (or Judases) mentioned in the New Testament was the author of this short epistle? Jude 1.**

The New Testament mentions the following persons who were named Juda or Judas:

1. Judas Iscariot (Mark 3:19).
2. Juda, the brother of James, Joses, and Simon (Mark 6:3).
3. Judas "not Iscariot" (John 14:22).
4. Judas of Galilee (Acts 5:37).
5. Judas of Damascus (Acts 9:11).
6. Judas surnamed Barsabas (Acts 15:22).

The writer of this epistle most likely was the second in the list as he mentions that he is the "brother of James." This James, as stepbrother of our Lord, presided at the Jerusalem Council and is considered to be the author of the Epistle of James. This would make Jude a stepbrother to Jesus too. Jude does not claim to be an apostle.

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:** "The epistle contains no direct statement concerning the circumstances that led to its being written, and no clue as to the congregation to which it was addressed, but certain information can be deduced from its contents. It is clear that disruptive elements had crept into the church (vs. 4, 8, etc.) and drawn many away from the purity of the gospel. Allusions in Colossians, the pastoral epistles, and Revelation indicate that Gnostic heresies had begun to come into the churches of Asia Minor. It is therefore possible that Jude's letter was addressed to these churches."—*S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 701.

**DAY**  
**3****II. FALSE TEACHERS UNMASKED (Verses 1-11).**

Jude confesses that "he gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation" (verse 3), but was deflected from his first intent by an emergency that arose among his readers. It would appear that the arrival of "ungodly men" (verse 4) among his flock led him to turn from his original purpose and to devote most of the remainder of his letter to fortifying the congregation against heretical teachings (verse 3).

**NOTE the similarities and the differences between this passage and 2 Peter 2:1-16.**

Jude's approach differs from Peter's in many ways. He makes no mention of "false prophets" or "false teachers" (2 Peter 2:1). Instead, he speaks of "certain men" who are "ungodly" or "impious," "lascivious" or "immoral," and who deny the lordship or divinity of Christ. He then markedly departs from Peter's outline, making no reference to Noah or to Lot, but writing of Israel's escape from Egypt and the death of the ungrateful, unbelieving multitude (verse 5). (Compare Num. 14:26-33.) Jude's comment on the rebellious angels is close to Peter's but stresses the finality of their punishment, for they were to be shackled "in everlasting chains" from which there would be no escape until judgment day. In a manner somewhat similar to Peter's he comments on the fate of the twin cities of the plain. But he adds "the cities about them," which confirms their gross immorality and the irreversible nature of their end—they suffered "the vengeance of eternal fire," that is, unquenchable fire (verse 7).

But these are differences in approach only. There is no conflict between Peter and Jude in their assessment of the dangers confronting their churches. It is inevitable that there should be differences between Peter and Jude, for the apostle devotes 22 verses (2:1-22) or a whole chapter to the destructive work of the errant teachers, while Jude uses only 12 verses (5-16) for the same purpose. Furthermore, Jude spends more space on certain topics than does Peter, so the difference between the two epistles grows even greater. This is emphasized when we note that Peter deals with "the angels that sinned" in verse 4 and does not refer to "angels which are greater in power and might" until verse 11, six intervening verses later. Jude, by contrast, makes his corresponding references in verses 6 and 9, with only two intervening verses. It will also be noted that Peter's reference to great and powerful angels in verse 11 does not mention "Michael the archangel," whereas Jude is specific, introducing the angelic leader by name and identifying the topic of dispute, "the body of Moses" (verse 9).

Closer examination of Jude's message reveals that while he gives more attention to the dispute over Moses, he deals only briefly with Balaam, and then refers to others whom Peter does not even mention, namely, Core or Korah (Jude 11; see also Numbers 16) and Cain. This may suggest that the two authors were writing for different groups of readers—Jude for Jewish Christians, Peter for Gentiles. Neither author slavishly reproduces the other's work, although the similarities are close enough to demand our recognition.

**What apostasy did the false teachers present to the church? Verses 4-8.**

1. Perverting the words of Scripture for their own immoral purposes. (See 2 Peter 2:2.)
2. Denying the lordship or divinity of Jesus Christ.
3. Rejecting established order. (See 2 Peter 2:10.)

What source did Jude use for his reference to Michael (Christ) contending with the devil about the body of Moses, and what significance can be found in such use? Verse 9.

Jude appears to be referring to a particular historical event that is not recorded in the Old Testament. It is thought that Jude draws on material found in the noncanonical book *The Assumption of Moses*. There the devil is said to claim Moses' body from Michael the archangel on the basis that the man of God belonged to him because he had slain an Egyptian overseer. Michael, who is Christ (see Dan. 12:1; Rev. 12:7; 1 Thess. 4:16), did not argue with Satan but left the faithful leader in God's hands. Ignoring the devil's vindictive charge, God resurrected His servant and gave him eternal life. If Michael the archangel were so restrained during such a contest, how much more subdued should be the erring instructors!

*The Assumption of Moses* "probably consisted originally of two distinct books, the Testament of Moses and the Assumption. The author, a Pharisee, attempted to draw his compatriots back to the old paths of implicit obedience to the Torah. Patriotically, he looked for the return of the ten tribes and felt that it was the duty of Israel to keep the law and to pray God to intervene in their behalf. This work seems to have been written during the 1st century A.D. Early Christian writers connected Jude 9 with this book, but Jude's words are not found in the Assumption in the sections that are extant today."—*S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 89.

If Jude used this book as his source, that does not mean that he recognized it as inspired. Many Bible writers used uninspired sources, with which their readers were familiar, to document or illustrate a point that they were making.

**DAY 4 SEARCH AND LEARN:** What three classic sins were the false teachers guilty of that characterized the following individuals?



1. Cain (Genesis 4) \_\_\_\_\_
2. Korah (Numbers 16) \_\_\_\_\_
3. Balaam (Numbers 22-24) \_\_\_\_\_

### III. FIVE METAPHORS CHARACTERIZE THE FALSE TEACHERS (Verses 12, 13).

In 2 Peter 2:17, the apostle used some strong metaphors to characterize the false teachers. In Lesson 8 we studied these: wells without water, slaves to sin, and sows that returned to the mire.

Jude uses five scathing metaphors to depict the character of the false teachers.

1. *Spots (or reefs) in the Christian love feasts.* They were concerned about their own interests and needs and not only careless of the needs of others but brazenly cared for themselves at the expense of others.

2. *Clouds without water.* They no more fulfill the promise of spiritual blessing than do the rainless clouds that pass over a drought-stricken land fulfill the promise of physical relief.

3. *Autumn trees without fruit.* At a time when fruit was to be expected they were "without fruit." They are "twice dead." That is, not only fruitless, but plucked up by the roots. They have returned to the state they were in before they found Christ.

4. *Untamed waves of the sea.* Their uncontrolled passions were evident to all.

5. *Wandering stars.* They serve no useful purpose, giving neither constant light nor guidance.

#### DAY IV. THEIR CERTAIN DOOM PROPHESED (Verses 14-16).

5

Jude here refers to another noncanonical book, the first book of Enoch.

"Jude's reference to Enoch and his quotation of that patriarch's prophecy has occasioned much comment. Commentators are in general agreement that the pseudepigraphical [writings falsely ascribed to famous persons of the past] book called 1 Enoch was in circulation among the Jews by the middle of the 1st century B.C. . . . Chapter 1:9 of this noncanonical work reads as follows: 'And behold! He cometh with ten thousands of His holy ones to execute judgment upon all, and to destroy all the ungodly: and to convict all flesh of all the works of their ungodliness which they have ungodly committed, and of all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him' (R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, p. 189).

"It is commonly believed that Jude quoted from this noncanonical work, though some hold the reverse to have been the case. If Jude quoted from 1 Enoch it was because the Holy Spirit led him to do so. . . .

". . . Both Peter and Jude view the Lord's coming in relation to the ungodly teachers, with Jude placing the greater emphasis on the judgment of the deceivers."—*S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 708.

#### COMPARE Jude 16 with 2 Peter 2:10, 12, 13, 18.

Although the phraseology differs, the message of each writer has the same objective—to warn against the deceptions aired by false prophets and to fortify church members in "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). Jude's letter undoubtedly succeeded in its laudable purpose.



**DAY V. EXHORTATION TO THE BELIEVERS (Verses 17-25).****6**

**REVIEW:** Inserted in the quarterly immediately before Lesson 12 is a page that introduces the book of Jude. As you restudy that page, note the series of exhortations in verses 17 to 23 that are summarized under the words *remember*, *remain*; and *remove*.

**To what prophecy does Jude refer in verses 17-19?**

In verses 17 to 19 Jude refers to an earlier prophecy that apparently was well known in the church. That forecast came from "the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ," and dealt with sensual skeptics who would deride the thought of the second coming. The only such specific prophecy recorded in the Bible is found in 2 Peter 3:3, 4. As we already have discussed that prophecy in lesson 9, we need only deal here with the relation between the two passages. If, as seems probable, Jude refers to Peter's prophecy, Peter's letter must have been written earlier. In that case, Jude, consciously or otherwise, made use of that epistle when writing his briefer but still powerful message. We also recognize that Peter's instruction could have been based on still earlier prophecies that were known in Christian communities but had not been written in gospels or letters that were later incorporated into the Bible.

Jude balances the efforts that believers should make toward their own spiritual development (verses 20-23) against the primacy of the Godhead in effecting our salvation (verses 24, 25). We are expected and encouraged to *build up* ourselves in our most holy faith (verse 20). We shall not be carried into the kingdom as patients are wheeled into an operating room. We are to cooperate with the Father, who is described as "God our Saviour" (verse 25), by taking every opportunity to strengthen our grasp and practice of the Christian faith as fortification against false teaching, no matter where it comes from. We are to pray under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and to make our efforts to remain within the orbit of God's widereaching love. This is to be done unselfishly, for we also must do all in our power to help others to share in the same salvation (verses 22, 23).

"*Others save with fear.*" Not only does Jude exhort his readers to pull those whose garments have been "spotted by the flesh" "out of the fire," but those who do so "are to be under the constant stimulus that comes from a realization of the fate awaiting the unsaved and from a recognition of their own inadequacy in view of the magnitude of the task that confronts them."—*S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 710.

**BENEDICTION:** Jude's letter concludes with a benediction that is matched in majesty only by Paul's prayers in Romans 16:25-27 and Ephesians 3:20, 21.

**DAY****7**

**FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:** "There are three aspects of the salutation of this catholic letter. First of all, the writer identifies himself by his given name, his close relationship to James the apostle, and his absolute servitude to Jesus Christ. If he was a relative of Jesus [as we

suppose], he does not state it directly. Modesty prevented him from going that far. To be associated with James, the leader of the Jerusalem church, was quite enough. Most important, however, is the fact that he was a servant or 'slave' of Jesus Christ. Christians are expendable in the cause of Christ. . . .

"Second, he speaks of his readers as those who are called, **beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ**. Though . . . unnamed these Christians share with Christians of all time three great experiences—called, beloved, kept. All Christians are called; that is, they have been summoned from what they are to what they should become. Calls of many kinds come to everyone, but this call is unique, decisive, and prophetic. All Christians are recipients of the love of God the Father. All Christians are kept not only as they pass through the trials of this life, but they are kept for the future Day of Jesus Christ. God is the guardian and guarantor of the Christian's deliverance here and in the end.

"Third, Jude prays that three graces may be multiplied in the lives of his readers—mercy, peace, and love. Mercy is the active and outgoing and continuous favor of God; peace is the deep blessedness that comes to those who are reconciled to God; love is the overarching and undergirding good will of God which is the context of 'life's little day,' and its future glory."—*The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 12, pp. 321-323.

"The instruction given by Jude from verse twenty to the close of the chapter, will make our work a complete whole, teaching us how to conduct the warfare in the service of Christ. No one-sided extravagance is to be revealed, no indolence or shiftlessness is to be indulged. We are not to ignore any man's individuality, or in any way to justify cold-hearted criticism or selfish practice.

"This scripture brings to view the fact that there is most earnest work to be done, and we need divine intuition that we may know how to work for souls ready to perish."—Ellen G. White Comments, *S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 953.

**SUMMARY:** Jude joins Peter in warning the early church against the deceptive teachings and influence of false teachers in their midst. He exhorts the believers to stand true to their faith and assures them that God is able to keep them from falling into Satan's snares.

#### **APPLICATION:**

- If your faith is worth having, it is worth sharing. Be sure to share it with someone this week.
- We these that you read, see, or hear this week.
- What church is preaching, writing, or teaching false doctrine?
- We are surrounded by false teachings. Be alert for and note some of these that you read, see, or hear this week.

#### **NOTES:**

# Ideals For Christians

**THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** 2 Peter 3:17, 18; Jude 24, 25.

**DAY 1** **MEMORY TEXT:** "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen." (Jude 24, 25).

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** Christian ideals can be attained through watchfulness against backsliding, by growth in grace and in knowledge of Christ, and by dependence on divine power.

**OVERVIEW:** The concluding messages of both Second Peter (3:17, 18) and Jude (20-25) present us with exalted spiritual counsel. Peter warns us against the danger of backsliding (verse 17), and recommends continuing growth in grace and knowledge (verse 18). Jude also urges us to foster faith, prayer, and a close connection with the Godhead while working for others' salvation (verses 20-23). Each completes his letter with a doxology. Peter's is brief (verse 18, last part). Jude's longer passage touches heavenly heights (verses 24, 25).

**INTRODUCTION:** After three months of study, we have become better acquainted with the author of the Second Epistle of Peter, whom we believe to be the apostle Peter himself. Many will undoubtedly understand and love him more deeply because of their study and will acknowledge a touch of sadness in concluding this study. Similar sentiments may arise from the glimpse we have had of Jude's briefer letter. Twelve weeks of companionship with such godly writers have enriched our sympathies with the early Christian communities and have brought us closer to the Master whom they served so faithfully.

Peter wrote a well-ordered letter. He has given us a clear introduction that conveys rich spiritual insights (chapter 1:1-4), followed by down-to-earth counsel (verses 5-12) and instructive biographical information (verses 13-21). In chapter 2 he unmasked and condemned the false teachers, and in chapter 3:1-7 he armed his readers against the apostates' wiles. From verse 8 onward he placed the advent hope in perspective, and brought his letter to an apt conclusion in verses 17 and 18.

Jude's epistle is no condensation of Peter's; neither is Peter's an expansion of Jude's. Each writer makes his own approach to his readers' immediate and long-term needs. Jude completes his shorter letter with a longer conclusion (verses 20-25) and in it gives us his sovereign address to God our Saviour.

## I. CONCLUDING WARNING (2 Peter 3:17).

The apostle Peter wrote to encourage, counsel, and warn his readers. Before closing the letter he paused to give a final admonition which shows that his readers' exposure to heretical teaching was much in his mind, even after his thorough analysis of the deceivers' tactics throughout chapter 2.

**In what tactful way did Pastor Peter alert his friends to the continuing danger that confronted them? 2 Peter 3:17.**

"You therefore, beloved, foreknowing be on your guard" is a literal rendering of the pastoral warning. The writer has not shaken off his awareness of the dangers that threaten the churches. Like specters, the images of the subverters continue to haunt him, and he gives some parting counsel that differs from all that has gone before. He couches that advice in phrases that are laden with love.

For the fourth time in this chapter he calls his readers "beloved" (see verses 1, 8, 14), clearly wishing to assure them of the Christian affection that prompts his every word to them. Then he underlines the reason for his emphatic exposure of those who have tried to lead them astray. He wants his readers to build up their own defenses and to lay in a store of personal knowledge, for he will not always be present to shield them from evil. As with Paul, so with Peter himself—the time of his departure is at hand (compare 2 Tim. 4:6) and the believers must learn to detect error and remain loyal to truth. To that end they must be on their guard against deceptions and recognize the danger of their being led astray even as others had been. Was the disciple remembering his own earlier weaknesses (Matt. 26:31-35) and his Master's repeated warnings (see Matt. 16:6-11; 24:4-12)?

There is no doubting the forcefulness of the apostolic warning here. He wants his readers to be aware of the possibility of their being "led astray with the error of the wicked." The language suggests the danger of their being led away by the specious reasoning of the lawless ones, the Greek word for "error" referring to a wandering or a roaming about. The word rendered "wicked" can be more precisely expressed as "without rule" or "lawless," "unprincipled." Those who refuse to be governed by law or principle are literally "lawless," "without law," but they forget or reject the fact that they still are subject to the "law of God." Once again, while being alert to dangerous heresies in the realm of theology, we should be careful not to apply Scripture spitefully to those who sincerely hold different views from our own. There is a vast difference between being immoral and guilty of leading souls to perdition, as were the false teachers, and having a sincerely held difference of opinion on matters that might not be vital to salvation.

The last phrase in verse 17 reveals Peter's ultimate concern for his distant friends. He does not want them to go the same way as those who are trying to deceive them. "Beware," says he, "that you do not fall out of your own firm position." Such counsel strengthens the exhortation al-

ready given in verse 14: "Be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace." This also harmonizes with other advice given by Christian leaders. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable" (1 Cor. 15:58). Still more clearly it echoes Christ's urgent words to His disciples as given in Luke 21:36, "Watch ye therefore."

DAY II. GROWING UP INTO CHRIST (2 Peter 3:18).

3

Long familiarity may have dulled the edge of our appreciation for the apostle's valedictory words. But we should not skim over them lightly, for they contain the formula for Christian living. They also present us with the ultimate prayer, the doxology, that should be in our hearts, on our lips, and evident in our lives now, and that will accompany us into eternity.

**In his parting advice, what does Peter recommend to his fellow Christians? 2 Peter 3:18.**

---

We do not know how long a time remained to the beloved leader, or if other opportunities came to send further messages to those whom he addressed in this epistle. So far as we know, these were his last written words to any church or group of churches. They must have been treasured by the original recipients, for they were preserved when much other correspondence was lost and were passed on to succeeding generations of the faithful. Eventually, they became part of Holy Scripture, to the strengthening of multitudes of believers. They should be precious in our eyes too. We should give earnest heed to them so that their rich significance does not escape our attention and our application.

Peter may have introduced some of his readers to the gospel personally and may have seen them begin a new life in Christ. But he knew that this was not enough. Just as a baby is beautiful in its miniature perfection, but brings anguish to its parents if it does not grow in normal ways, so is a newborn Christian in the eyes of his spiritual parents. If the church member does not increase in spiritual stature, he remains stunted spiritually and will not fulfill the promise that attended his baptism. If lack of growth persists, he will remain as helpless as a babe and spiritually will die prematurely.

The tender shepherd was well aware of the dangers that confronted his flock. He therefore counseled each member not merely to grow, but to "keep on growing" (the present continuous tense in the Greek). Such growth accords with natural development. A child who fails to keep on growing will be stunted. An adult who reaches physical maturity and ceases to develop his mental capacities becomes an intellectual dwarf. Unfortunately, many young Christians who have begun a new life in Jesus fail to increase in spiritual capacity. They may be adult in body but remain babes in all that concerns the spirit. To lessen the number of such tragedies, Peter urges us to "keep on growing." This already has been stressed in chapter 1 where Peter urges us to be "partakers of the divine nature" and to add to our store of Christian virtues (verse 3-8).

DAY

4

How does the growth mentioned in 2 Peter 3:18 take place? The apostle provides the answer. We are to "grow in grace" and in "knowledge." In this development, "grace" is more than an external adornment that makes us "gracious." It is a many-sided attribute that enables us to become like Christ. (See comment on 2 Peter 1:2 and on 1:5-8 in Lesson 1 for a fuller discussion of "grace," and the *S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, volume 6, pages 503, 504, and 660.)

For "knowledge" (*gnosis*) we might, in view of Peter's earlier sensitivity to the word (chapter 1:2, 3, and 8), have expected to read *epignosis*. (See comment in Lesson 1.) But the distinction concerning grades of knowledge is not needed here, for Peter defines his own meaning by writing of "the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." This far transcends a mere knowledge of facts. It embraces a personal acquaintance with Jesus and the experience of His converting and sustaining power in our lives. Above all else it includes deep love for the One who "loved us, and hath given himself for us" (Eph. 5:2). As in a love-filled marriage the partners' knowledge of and love for each other grow ever deeper, so should our knowledge of and love for our Redeemer continue to deepen and grow during this life in preparation for boundless development through the eternal years.

**What should we spontaneously give to our Lord and Saviour? Why should we do this? 2 Peter 3:18.**

We might have assumed that concluding an epistle with a doxology or expression of praise was the standard New Testament procedure. But, of the 21 letters in the New Testament, only three close with direct praise to a member of the Godhead—Romans 16:27; 2 Peter 3:18; and Jude 25—while Hebrews 13:20, 21 satisfies the formula but does not close the letter, being followed by four verses of a general nature. This observation enables us to appreciate the lofty quality of Peter's contribution. He is not following a standard procedure, conforming to a stereotype, but is exercising thoughtful individuality by directing his readers to the privilege of ascribing glory to their Lord.

There is no doubt about the object of the apostle's paean of praise, for Jesus Christ is declared to be its recipient. The writer expects that growth in grace and knowledge will incite and inspire developing Christians to render the highest possible praise to Christ. This confirms belief in our Lord's divinity, for it is only to One who is God that *the glory* would be offered. The use of the definite article before the Greek word for "glory" in the original indicates that Peter here is referring to *the* glory or honor that belongs to Divinity alone and to no others in the universe. And such honor relates not merely to the passing present, but will continue "for ever" or more literally, "unto the day of the age," that is, into eternity.

The apostle also implies that it is by their conduct that his readers will now render the most exalted praise. Mere words, no matter how beautiful or how well spoken, are not enough. A believer's life, growing in grace and in knowledge, will offer to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit the sweetest of all doxologies. An ever-developing Christian life presents the sincerest sacrifice of praise to our Creator.

On this stimulating note Peter brings his epistle to its close. Within its modest length he has set before us the highest of Christian ideals—"all things that pertain unto life and godliness," that we might be "partakers of the divine nature" (chapter 1:3, 4). He has encouraged us to make our "calling and election sure" (verse 10). To that end he has reminded us of the glory and the implications of the transfiguration (verses 12-21), of dangers from false teachers (chapter 2), of the realities of the Deluge (chapter 3:1-7), and of the certainties of our Lord's return (verses 8-16). Careful consideration of his message should enable us to fulfill by God's grace the ideals that our Father has for His children.

### DAY III. COMPARISON WITH JUDE 17-21.

5

As we have already noted there is no regular pattern of similarity between the Second Epistle of Peter and that of Jude. Threads of thought that are common to both letters are so tangled that it is difficult to follow them verse by verse. There is, for instance, no direct equivalent in Jude of Peter's consideration of the Flood (2 Peter 2:5 and 3:5-7). Neither does the extended study of the second coming in 2 Peter 3:8-14 find its counterpart in Jude, while Peter makes no reference to Michael the archangel nor to Enoch (Jude 9 and 14). Such differences run throughout the two letters and culminate toward their close. Peter spends verses 15 and 16 of his closing chapter on Paul and his writings. Jude makes no reference to Paul. Peter concludes his letter with a final warning against deception (verse 17) and a concise benediction and doxology. Jude devotes three of his closing verses (17-19) to recalling apostolic counsels and includes a reference (verse 18) to mockers that may be a quotation from Peter's letter (3:3) or, more remotely, from Paul's letter to Timothy (2 Tim. 3:1-5). Then Jude makes a positive pastoral application of the scoffers' skepticism by urging his readers to build on their "most holy faith" and to keep themselves "in the love of God" while awaiting the advent (verses 20, 21). And, to save them from un-Christlike reactions against any who have been led astray, he commends compassionate treatment of waverers (verses 22, 23).

**Note the exalted tone with which Jude ends his epistle. Jude 24, 25.**

There is no doubt as to the subject of Jude's closing words. The author obviously addresses "the only wise God our Saviour" in verse 25, where the best manuscripts omit the word "wise" and clearly refer to the one and only true God. Other well-attested readings include the phrase "through Jesus Christ our Lord." This makes clear that the principal reference is to the Father who effects our salvation through His willing Son. This harmonizes with John 3:16 and 1 John 4:9. In his pastoral epistles Paul also underlines the Father's initiative several times (1 Tim. 1:1; 2:2, 3; 2 Tim. 1:8, 9; Titus 1:3; 2:10; 3:4), supporting Jude's use of the title "the only God our Saviour." How increasingly grateful we ought to be for the Eternal's gift of His Son for our salvation!

The above thoughts enable us to identify "him that is able to keep you from falling" (Jude 24). He is the Lord God Omnipotent. What comfort

that realization brings to those of us who also are "tossed about with many a conflict, many a doubt." Our God is able to guard us from stumbling, particularly over false teachings that trouble the faithful in every age, in Jude's day and in ours. He does not remove us from the possibility of falling. That would deprive us of all initiative—we could not be bad if we wanted to. But he does promise to uphold us so that even when sin trips us up, we do not go down to total defeat. He raises us up, He holds us steady, and He renews our determination to attain to His standards.

**DAY 6** What more does God do? He gives to faulty human beings the incomparable privilege of ultimately being "faultless," that is, blameless or without blemish. "By the enabling grace of Christ the Christian lives with a confident belief in God's power to keep him from falling into sin and to enable him, eventually to stand spotless and unashamed in His glorious presence."—*S.D.A Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 710.

In the face of such a revelation, do we need to wonder at the sublimity of Jude's gratitude? Should ours be any less intense? As already noted, after the title "God our Saviour," Jude included the words "through Jesus Christ our Lord" (NEB). This teaches that we can offer acceptable praise to the Eternal only through Christ's good offices. Shall we not join him in ascribing to God "glory and majesty, might and authority" (NEB)? Those supercharged words are inadequate to identify all that we shall want to attribute to our divine Redeemer when we come into His holy, eternal presence. We shall humbly recognize then what we can perceive only dimly now, that the Saviour God whom we worship has always possessed and shall forever retain those attributes—they are eternal, "Before all time, now, and for evermore" (NEB).

**MEDITATION:** Study Jude 24, 25 thoughtfully. Then indicate below what the following phrases mean to you:

"him that is able" \_\_\_\_\_

"keep you from falling" \_\_\_\_\_

"present you faultless" \_\_\_\_\_

"presence of his glory" \_\_\_\_\_

"with exceeding joy" \_\_\_\_\_

"the only wise God our Saviour" \_\_\_\_\_

After you are sure that you understand what these verses are saying, repeat them in prayer several times, putting in "me" instead of "you" and "my" instead of "our."

**DAY 7** **REVIEW OF THIS QUARTER'S LESSONS:** One good approach would be to read Second Peter and Jude straight through at one sitting.

The general title for this quarter's lessons, *Ideals for Christians*, is



closely related to the substance of Peter's and Jude's concerns for their fellow Christians. They wanted to help them live victoriously in a pagan world. To this end they gave counsel that was eminently suited to their circumstances. It is part of the miracle of Holy Writ that this advice, given almost 2000 years ago, still is most appropriate for those of us who live on the verge of the twenty-first century.

Let us conclude our quarter's study by identifying some of the Christian ideals that are emphasized in the two epistles. Some already have been emphasized, notably, our need for "grace" and "knowledge," "great and precious promises," and those qualities that form part of Peter's ladder (2 Peter 1:5-7). We might profitably review these and evaluate the part each plays in our own personalities and life-styles as believers.

In addition, we may wish to refresh our understanding and exercise of these other positive qualities (sometimes expressed negatively) that figure prominently in the second letter written by Peter:

Diligence	1:10; 3:14
Remembrance	1:12, 13, 15; 3:1, 2
Understanding of prophecy	1:19-21
Avoidance of covetousness	2:3, 15, 16
Other-worldliness	2:5-8
Sexual purity	2:10, 13, 14, 18, 20
Awareness of history	3:3-7
Knowledge of God's patience	3:8, 9
Preparedness for the advent	3:10-14
Spiritual growth	3:18
Reverence for divinity	3:18

The Holy Spirit is waiting to assist each of us in developing these Christian ideals in our characters.

**APPLICATION:** "Jesus says, 'Without Me ye can do nothing.' Our growth in grace, our joy, our usefulness,—all depend upon our union with Christ. It is by communion with Him, daily, hourly,—by abiding in Him,—that we are to grow in grace. He is not only the Author, but the Finisher of our faith. It is Christ first and last and always. He is to be with us, not only at the beginning and the end of our course, but at every step of the way. David says, 'I have set the Lord always before me: because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.' Psalm 16:8."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 69.

"No subject of contemplation will tend more to humble the mind, than thoughts of God. . . . But while the subject *humbles* the mind, it also *expands* it. He who often thinks of God, will have a larger mind than the man who simply plods around this narrow globe. . . . The most excellent study for expanding the soul, is the science of Christ, and Him crucified, and the knowledge of the Godhead in the glorious Trinity. Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the Deity."—C. H. Spurgeon, quoted by J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), pp. 13, 14.

# Lessons for First Quarter, 1986

Sabbath School members who have not received a copy of the Adult Lessons for the first quarter of 1986 will be helped by the following outline in studying the first two lessons. The title of this series is "One Lord, One Faith."

## First Lesson:

"ONE HOPE OF YOUR CALLING"

MEMORY TEXT: Eph. 4:4.

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Eph. 1:1, 2; 6:21-24.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Paul wrote this epistle while under house arrest in Rome. It portrays the strong spiritual ties that he felt for the believers in a church that he had much to do with establishing.

OUTLINE:

- I. The Author (Eph. 1:1; 3:1; 4:1; 6:20).
- II. The Recipients (Eph. 1:1; 2:11).
- III. The Date and the Occasion for Writing (Eph. 4:1; 6:20).
- IV. Paul's Greeting and Farewell (Eph. 1:2; 6:23, 24).

## Second Lesson:

THE BLESSINGS OF THE BELIEVER

MEMORY TEXT: Eph. 1:10.

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Eph. 1:3-14.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: God has a plan that is all-inclusive. He longs to unite every created being into one body. We can be thankful that His plan is so comprehensive that it includes each one of us individually.

OUTLINE:

- I. Prelude of Praise (Eph. 1:3).
- II. Thankful for Being Chosen—Election (Eph. 1:4-6).
- III. Thankful for Being Rescued—Redemption (Eph. 1:7).
- IV. Thankful to God for His Inheritance—Restoration (Eph. 1:8-14).

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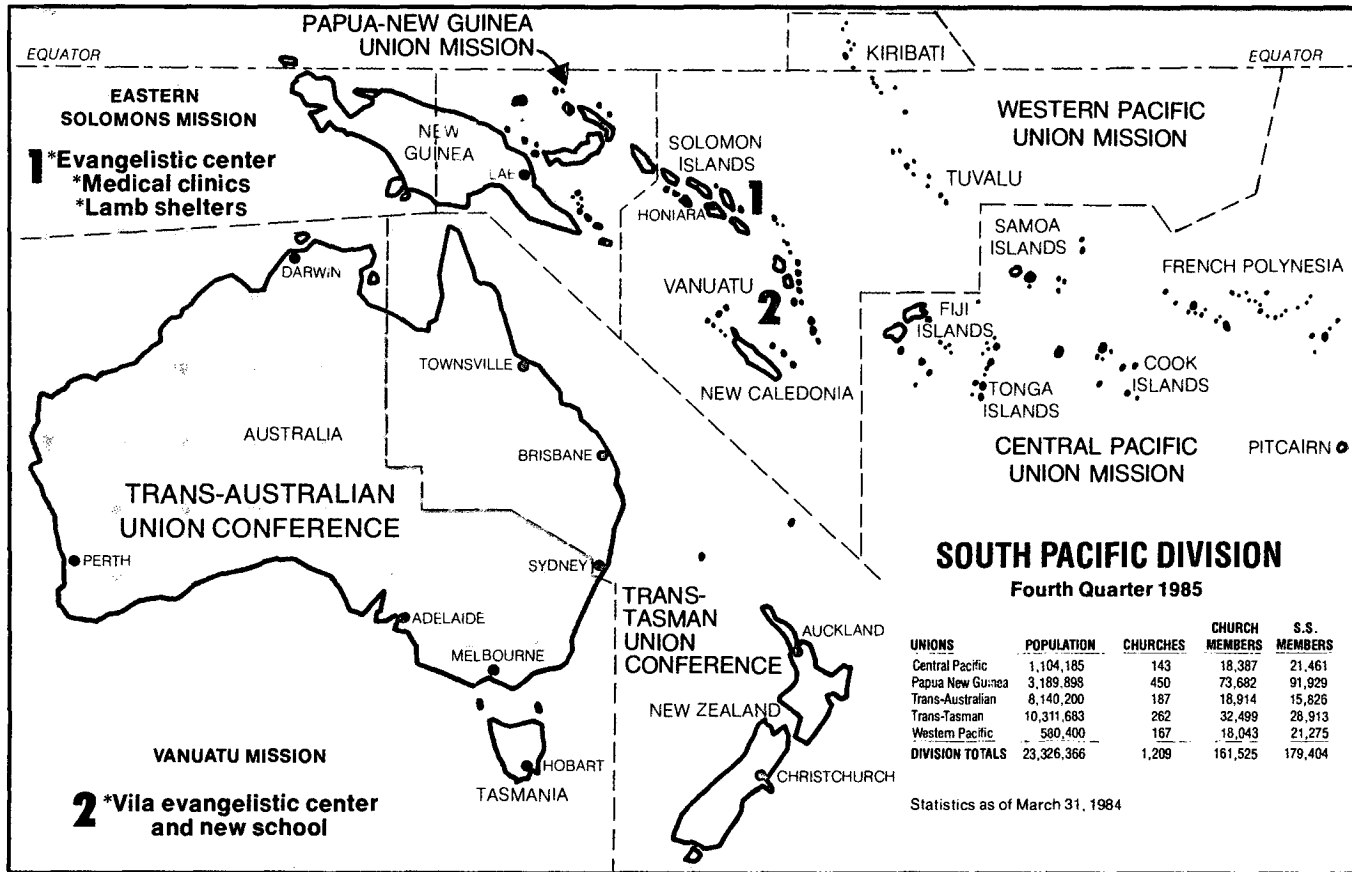
me." —Ellen G. White, *White Comments*, Vol. 7, p. 941.

In John 3:14 we find Jesus telling Nicodemus that He must be "lifted up" on the cross. To lift up is to place in on the cross becomes the great center of attraction. As beings are drawn together all that separates, is overcome as the mightiest of rebellion, the sinfulness, The cross now serves as the mightiest of attraction.

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## SOUTH PACIFIC DIVISION

Fourth Quarter 1985

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Central Pacific	1,104,185	143	18,387	21,461
Papua New Guinea	3,189,898	450	73,682	91,929
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Trans-Tasman	10,311,683	262	32,499	28,913
Western Pacific	580,400	167	18,043	21,275
<b>DIVISION TOTALS</b>	<b>23,326,366</b>	<b>1,209</b>	<b>161,525</b>	<b>179,404</b>

Statistics as of March 31, 1984