

New Testament Studies

Letters of Peter

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1 Peter—Steadfast in Suffering

Introduction—

Author and recipients—Peter, associated with his amanuensis and probable bearer of the letter, Silas, composed this letter most likely from Rome in the mid-60s, around the time of Nero's intense persecution of believers in the vicinity of Rome. At the end of 1 Peter, Peter sends greetings to the recipients from “she who is in Babylon” (1 Pt. 5:13). This was likely code for Rome given the political atmosphere in the capital city at the time. Silas (or Silvanus) was a significant leader in the early church chosen as one to deliver the verdict of the Jerusalem Council to the church at Antioch (Acts 15:22) and a prophet-preacher in his own right (Acts 15:32). He was the replacement for Barnabas on Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 15:40) when Paul and Barnabas split up.

The authorship and canonicity of the book was not questioned until modern times. The primary challenges to the book are on two grounds:

- The Greek of 1 Peter is particularly good, allegedly beyond the competence of Peter. A comparison with the rougher Greek of 2 Peter is stark. However, Peter himself acknowledges the help of Silvanus (Silas) (5:12) and it there were occasions when an amanuensis (a secretary/editor) exercised editorial latitude in the actual composition of a manuscript. Silas may have contributed much to this letter's style and literary quality.
- The book reflects a period of persecution descriptive of the latter part of Domitian's reign (81-96) or that of Trajan (98-117) when Asia was under the governorship of Pliny the Younger. Since Peter died in the persecution of Nero in the mid-60s, critics dismiss the possibility that he is the author.

However, dating this book to the early second century is just a critical assertion. Persecution of Christians in Asia Minor occurred at other times as well. While Nero's persecution was confined to Rome, zealous governors could have made things difficult for Christians in the provinces as well. The suffering described in the book may well have been the inevitable and adverse reply of a pagan society to a sizable, growing, and vocal Christian presence in their midst. While the initial stage of that reaction was not life-threatening, it did make life tough for believers.

The recipients are believers scattered among five Roman provinces north of the Taurus Mountains in Asia Minor (modern day central Turkey). They were going through a time of repression and/or persecution. Peter refers to suffering fifteen times in the letter. The believers were suffering for living upstanding lives, for doing what was good and right (2:19-23; 3:14-18; 4:1-4, 15-19), and were bearing insults for the name of Christ (3:10; 4:14). This was not what these young believers anticipated when they responded to the gospel. Peter writes to encourage them to be good witnesses and to remember that any suffering would lead to glory (1:6-7; 3:13-14; 5:10).

Purpose and theme—Living hope is a major theme of 1 Peter. The book has been called the Job of the New Testament. Peter is preeminently the apostle of hope, as Paul is of faith, and John is of love. This confident hope gives us the encouragement and enablement we need for daily living.

The basic problem for Peter's audience was to live for God amid a society ignorant of the true God and abusive in their treatment of his followers. Peter's purpose is pastoral, to help the early believers see their temporary sufferings in the full light of the coming eternal glory. 1 Peter emphasizes a godly life

of submission and good deeds amid hardship.

Guiding Concepts:

Suffering & Old Testament allusions and quotes—There are many direct quotes of and allusions to the Old Testament in 1 Peter. Half of them deal with Peter’s use of the stone imagery of Isaiah 8 and 28 and Psalm 118 (Isa. 8:12, 14 in 2:8a, 3:14b; Isa. 28:16 in 2:6; Ps 118:22 in 2:7b). These stone imagery texts were linked and spoke of God being believers’ rest and sanctuary in times of trouble.

Peter links these stone testimonies to the righteous sufferer, using Psalm 34 as his text. In Psalm 34, David is praising God amid his difficulties in a pagan land (Philistia) while fleeing from Saul. In Peter’s mind, the stone testimonies speak to God as our anchor and David’s psalm to our response in obedience to His character and ability to preserve us.

Pictures of the Church—1 Peter 2 is a classic text in understanding the church. The picture of a house describes the spiritual reality of what God is doing in and through His people. Jesus is our cornerstone. We are joined together in one structure, each contributing his or her part, all choice and precious to God. Our identity and mission is elaborated on. We are “a chosen nation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people for God’s own possession”. The titles connect the expanded church to the people of Israel and the covenant God made with Abraham.

Pilgrim journey—1 Peter 2:11-12 is a key text describing our alien, pilgrim status in a fallen world. However, this reality is held in dynamic tension with that of being God redemptive agents in that world claiming it for its rightful Lord.

Nature & authority of Scripture—1 Peter 1:10-12; 2 Peter 1:19-21 are texts clearly asserting the authority of Scripture.

Summary Outline: 1 Peter—Steadfast in Suffering

- I. Salutation; Praise for Living Hope Amidst Suffering (1:1-12)
 - A. Salutation (1:1-2)
 - B. Hope for eternal inheritance (1:3-5)
 - C. Rejoicing in suffering: Faith refined (1:6-9)
 - D. Prophetic word: Grace through suffering (1:10-12)
- II. Setting Your Hope on God (1:13-25)
 - A. Holiness enjoined (1:13-16)
 - B. Living as strangers in reverent fear (1:17-21)
 - C. Purity and love from enduring Word (1:22-25)
- III. Lives that Turn Slander to Praise (2:1-12)
 - A. Ridding themselves of carnal habits and craving pure spiritual food (2:1-3)
 - B. Built into a spiritual house to be royal priesthood and being a people belonging to God (2:4-10)
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- IV. Submission to Authority (2:13-3:7)
 - A. Rulers: Living as free servants (2:13-17)
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- V. Suffering for Doing Good (3:8-4:11)
 - A. Call to righteous living (3:8-12)
 - B. Attitude while suffering for doing good (3:13-17)
 - C. Christ's example: Death of the righteous for the unrighteous (3:18-22)
 - D. Resultant lifestyle: Living for God (4:1-6)
 - E. Living with the end in view (4:7-11)
- VI. Suffering as a Christian (4:12-5:11)
 - A. Before a faithful creator (4:12-19)
 - B. Shepherds of suffering flocks (5:1-4)
 - C. Submission, humility, and watchfulness (5:5-11)
- VII. Purpose for Writing; Final Greetings (5:12-14)

1 Peter—Steadfast in Suffering

I. Salutation; Praise for Living Hope Amidst Suffering (1:1-12)—Christians are born for glory (1:2-4) by the election of the Father, the redeeming work of the Son, and the sanctifying work of the Spirit, kept for glory by the power of God (1:5), prepared for glory as we obey him through trials (1:6-7), and can enjoy a measure of glory now (1:8-12).

A. Salutation (1:1-2)—In typical fashion for ancient letters, Peter introduces himself, identifies the recipients, scattered believers in Roman provinces north of the Taurus Mountains, and provides a word of greeting. He speaks of the believers as the elect, chosen according to God's foreknowledge, through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit for obedience to the Lord Jesus. The doctrine of election is a ground for comfort to the scattered believers in danger of persecution, reminding them that God's purposes are certain and gracious. It is foundational to the believers' ability to persevere through trials. The good Lord's sovereign hand was on their lives and that was a source of confidence for them as they encounter trials of various kinds. The Spirit's sanctifying work is his operation in applying the Lord Jesus' redemptive work to the believers.

Peter praises God for the glorious salvation that was the inheritance and expectation of the believers. With such a hope, they could view their trials as testing and perfecting their faith. This was a cause for joy, not because they were being tried, but because they were being refined for glory. Their heavenly destination was assured.

Christians are chosen, set apart, sanctified for obedience, and redeemed for a glorious inheritance. We need to remind ourselves frequently and seriously who we are. We are people who, by the mercy of God, have been chosen for a strange double life. We simultaneously are inhabitants of this earthly reality and citizens of God's new creation. We are set apart to be signposts to this new reality.

B. Hope for eternal inheritance (1:3-5)—God is praised for the living hope of the gospel. A new birth into a living hope, into an inheritance that can never perish, through faith shielded by God's power had placed the believers in the position of awaiting the full salvation ready to be revealed in the end times. The Father is the source and the Spirit is the operative agent of the new birth. The hope is for an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade. Becoming a Christian means that what God did for the Lord Jesus at Easter he does for us in the depths of our beings.

C. Rejoicing in suffering: Faith refined (1:6-9)—Present trials test our faith and wet our appetite for our glorious inheritance. Any suffering Christians may endure is in the backdrop of this glorious inheritance. Christians rejoice not because of suffering but because of their glorious expectation. Suffering is the milieu where the quality of Christian faith can shine out all the more. When Jesus is finally revealed this will result in an explosion of praise.

1:7—The image of the righteous being tested like precious metals purified in a furnace comes for such Old Testament passages as Job 23:10, Psalm 12:6, Proverbs 17:3, Isaiah 43:2; Jeremiah 11:4 and others. Faith tested is better than faith untested. Unlike the testing in James (Jas. 1:2-4), persecution is the backdrop of testing in this letter.

D. Prophetic word: Grace through suffering (1:10-12)—This salvation was the subject of the Old Testament prophecies of Messianic suffering and exaltation. The prophets longed to see the Messianic times and searched for a more definitive view. They were unable to fully understand how the sufferings of Messiah related to his glorification. They did not know the details but knew that many of the details would make sense to believing readers once they happened. They were serving the believers with information about things into which even the angels longed to look.

II. Setting Your Hope on God (1:13-25)—This section relates to a lifestyle of a saved person. It includes portions relating to a life of hope and holiness (1:13-16), a life of reverence before God (1:17-21), and a life of love (1:22-25). The reception of salvation must result in a life of holiness, reverence, and love.

Application—It is not easy to live a set-part life in this world. This passage provides spiritual incentives to encourage the believers to a sanctified lifestyle:

- The glory of God (1:13)—Christians should live in the future tense. Our demeanor now should be governed by our future hope. We are to gird their minds for action and live sober, self-controlled lives with eyes on the prize.
- Holiness of God (1:14-15)—God is holy. Therefore, his children should live holy lives. We are partakers of the divine nature (2 Pt. 1:4) and should display that nature in the way we live.
- Word of God (1:16)—The Word has a sanctifying ministry in the lives of dedicated believers. In it, we find precepts, principles, promises, and personal examples to guide us in our lives right now.
- Judgment of God (1:17)—We will be judged. This does not relate to salvation but to reward. It is a “family judgment” and we should want to do Father proud.
- Love of God (1:18-21)—He reminds them of what they were rescued from and why—the love God.

A. Holiness enjoined (1:13-16)—Future hope drives us to the present to live transformed lives now. The character of the One who calls us is the standard for our behavior. Peter quotes from Leviticus 11:44-45 in enjoining set apart living from the followers of the Lord Jesus.

Note the progression in this text. The emphasis of 1:13 is on putting one’s hope in the final consummation of the grace of God in the Lord Jesus. The believers were to gird their minds for holy action and live soberly, embracing sound judgment in all areas of life. They were not to be conformed to the base desires that formerly dominated them (1:14). They were to embrace purity and moral integrity (1:15-16). Peter cites Leviticus 11:44-45, urging the believers to be holy (set apart) because the Lord God is holy.

B. Living as strangers in reverent fear (1:17-21)—Since judgment is certain, the believers who are saved by grace must abound in good works as evidence of that saving grace, for their lives will be evaluated by the Lord. They were saved by the Lord’s atoning sacrifice according to God’s plan. The believers’ faith comes through the work of the Lord Jesus who reveals the Father.

The idea of reverent fear drives this exhortation. The call to set apart living has the twin guideposts of judgment and sonship, of accountability and of the earnest desire to please the Father. We must give an account to the God we yearn to please. The milieu though which we travel is only a prelude to our true home.

1:17—Since judgment is certain, Christians are to live in reverent awe of God. Our lives in this earthly tent are temporary, a brief time granted that should be used carefully.

1:18-21—The believers had been redeemed from their empty way of life by a wondrous atonement, so they should purify themselves by obeying the truth and sincerely loving the brethren.

C. Purity and love from enduring Word (1:22-25)—Set apart living and sincere love have their foundation in hearing and adhering to the imperishable Word of God.

Peter adds to this section on the Christian way of life the command to love one another and reverence God. Being purified from sin enables believers to love their fellow believers purely and sincerely. In

addition, having been born again of the living word, that which lasts forever, enables believers to live as they should in love. Peter quotes Isaiah 40:6-8 in support of this.

1:24-25—Peter quotes Isaiah 40:6-8 to underline that the Word of God, through which they had been born again, is imperishable and enduring. This once again underlines the assurance of their salvation and the eternal hope that strengthens them through trials.

III. Lives that Turn Slander to Praise (2:1-12)—The believers were to rid themselves of the habits and vices of the old nature, desire pure spiritual nourishment, and grow up in Christ (2:1-3). They were to realize that they were living stones in a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, a chosen people (2:4-8). As aliens and strangers in this present tent, they were to live model lives to turn the slander of their pagan neighbors into praise to the sovereign God (2:9-12). The central idea in this is our identification with the Lord Jesus Christ, with its key correspondences being living set part lives in him, suffering for him, and being exaltation with him. Behavior advocated in the household codes that followed (2:13-3:12) would undermine the traditional slanders against the believers, that they subverted public order and traditional family values.

A. Ridding themselves of carnal habits and craving pure spiritual food (2:1-3)—The believers must rid themselves of pagan vices, stripping off carnal habits like old ratty garments. 1 Peter 2:1 is a mini-vice list. These lists were common in the ancient world and in the New Testament (see Mk. 7:21-22; Rom. 1:29-31; 13:13; 1 Cor. 5:10; Gal. 5:19-20; 2 Pt. 2:10-14). 1 Peter 2:2 speaks of the believers earnestly yearning for pure spiritual food. 1 Peter 2:3 is an allusion to Psalm 34:8, urging them to taste and see that the Lord is indeed good! They were born of imperishable seed through the living an enduring Word of God and they needed the pure spiritual milk to grow up obeying the truth and loving the brethren. The Word was the message of Jesus, about what God had done through fulfilling the ancient prophecies of Scripture.

B. Built into a spiritual house to be royal priesthood and being a people belonging to God (2:4-10)—Christ is the cornerstone and the believers are living stones of a spiritual house (2:4-8). The localized manifestation of God's presence on earth (the temple) is replaced by his indwelling of all believers in both an individual and a corporate sense (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19). The wonderful new truth resident in this text is that through the Lord Jesus and his work on the Cross, every believer is part of a new priestly order. This means that every believer has immediate access to God, that they serve God personally, and they have something to give in ministry to others.

2:4-8—Peter utilizes the stone imagery of Isaiah 8 and 28 and the image of the Righteous sufferer in Psalm 118 so that the believers might be secure in their identity and follow the Lord Jesus' example through challenging times. The believers follow the Lord in his humiliation and then in his exaltation. There is no hint that their patient endurance ever pays off in the present age.

2:6-8—These verses quote from Isaiah 8:14 and 28:16 and Psalm 118:22. 1 Peter 2:7 quotes from Isaiah 28:16 and refers to God's foundation stone of this new spiritual house. The foundation stone determined the lay of the building. Isaiah is encouraging people to build on the Lord himself. In 1 Peter 2:8, the first quote is from Psalm 118:22, where the builders reject a building block that later turns out to be the capstone of the building (see Mk. 12:10-12). The second is from Isaiah 8:14 where the disobedient ones stumble over the stone.

2:9-10—1 Peter 2:9 is a rich text describing the believers as a chosen people, a royal house, a body of priests and a people belonging to God. The functions that Israel was called into existence to perform in the Old Testament is now the church's task to perform in the New Testament. Peter believed that all God's promises to Israel had been fulfilled in the Lord Jesus and that therefore all who belonged to the

Lord Jesus had been brought into the new people of God, the new temple edifice. Note that in the future, God will once again use Israel as a blessing to themselves and to others through them (see Rom. 11:13-16, 23-24). 1 Peter 2:10 is a free-lance use of Hosea 1:6, 9-10; 2:23. That text describes God's rejection of disobedient Israel, followed by their future restoration. These verses parallel God's description of Israel in Exodus 19:5-6 and Deuteronomy 7:6. The people of God are to be chosen and holy new nation in contrast to the rebellious people of the wilderness wanderings.

C. Living as aliens and strangers to God's glory (2:11-12)—Peter reminds the believers of their position in Christ. They are aliens and strangers in this world and therefore should not derive their values from this transitory existence. He warns them to abstain from evil desires and tells them that those desires war against their souls. The believers should lead noble lives amid a hostile pagan society so that the pagans who take notice will not slander the believers and, in the future, might glorify God. The kind of charges the pagan society brought against believers included:

- Disloyalty to the state (Jn. 19:12);
- Upsetting commerce or patterns of divination (Acts 16:16ff; 19:23ff);
- Not participating in festivals and being "haters of mankind" (Col. 2:16);
- Being atheists because they had no idols (Acts 15:29);
- Generally holding anti-social values, due to their set apart lifestyles.

IV. Submission to Authority (2:13-3:7)—What follows are household codes, instructions of how to behave toward the State and various members of one's household. Stoic and other pagan philosophers used these ethical codes to delineate proper relationships with others. As a slandered religious group, adopting responsible codes demonstrated that the group supported the commendable values of society. That demonstration was important in heading off repression and persecution. Peter is exhorting the believers to live with integrity in everyday relationships: with the governing authorities (2:13-17), in their work (2:18-25), and with their spouse (3:1-7).

This section of the letter emphasizes submission in the life of the believer. Submission is not a popular topic in our culture that is increasingly lawless and on a perpetual quest for personal fulfillment. Peter offers us excellent motives for submitting to authority in our lives and living dedicated and obedient Christian lives:

- Because of who we are—a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.
- Because it is for our own good—Peter is speaking of sinful desires waging war against our soul.
- Because of our influence on others. Doing what is right serves as a witness to the world. We are in Christ and that ought to be motivation enough to live the kind of life that witnesses to the excellencies of the Lord Jesus. We are to live as resident aliens in this world in such a way as to silence the slanderous accusations made against us.

Illustration—Little boy watching a minister build a wooden trellis. Pleased at the thought that his work was being admired, the minister asked the boy if he was interested in carpentry and trying to pick up some pointers. The lad quickly said "no." "I'm just waiting to hear what a preacher says when he hits his thumb with a hammer."

A. Rulers: Submission to civil authorities (2:13-17)—This text is in the context of ordinary situations. Peter will speak of more demanding situations later in this letter (3:14, 17; 4:1, 12-19). Living as free people in proper submission to authority has the context of the believers' freedom in Christ, liberated from their bondage of sin. Roman aristocrats were much quicker to malign minority religions, whose worship did not assimilate Roman values, than to seek to understand them (2:15). The believers should not use that spiritual freedom as a pretext for disregarding proper authorities in their

lives. Peter sums up Christian duties to civil authorities in four succinct commands:

- Show proper respect to everyone;
- Love the brethren;
- Fear God;
- Honor the king.

B. Masters and slaves—Bearing unjust suffering (2:18-25)—This section encompasses commands to household slaves to submit to their masters (2:19-20) followed by the example of Christ's submission (2:21-25). He counsels submission even when slaves are under harsh masters. Peter sees it as commendable in the sight of God to do good and endure suffering in such situations. Devotion to God and honoring him overrides personal comfort and suffering.

This passage addresses household slaves. The field slaves of massive estates were more oppressed than household slaves. The slaves who were most oppressed were those who worked the mines. Their condition was terrible.

Peter does not address the institution of slavery per se, but his sympathy is clearly with those enslaved (2:20-21). No ancient slave war was ever successful, and its consequences were brutal and overbearingly repressive. The abolition of slavery in that day was an impossibility. In this situation, it was far more practical to encourage those enslaved to deal with their situation and attempt to gain their freedom, if possible. Ephesians 6:5-9, Colossians 3:22-25, and the letter to Philemon also address this concern.

Moderns need to understand that slavery was as much the fabric of ancient society as electricity or automobiles are in ours. Peter's reasoning was that their suffering was connected to Messiah's. The suffering of Messiah is not only how we are rescued from our sin but also the means, when extended through Messiah's people, by which the world may be brought to a new place.

2:21-25—He points to the suffering of the Lord Jesus as the example they were to follow. The Lord did not retaliate but entrusted himself to the Father's will and purpose, confident of a just judgment. The sufferings of Christ referred to in this text are exemplary as well as propitiatory. Just as Christ suffered unjustly for doing God's will during his earthly trek, so Christian slaves may have to follow in the same way. Suffering is the way redemption comes to the world. Christ suffered for us, an example for our suffering in the world.

In verses 22-25, Peter quotes or alludes to Isaiah 53, one of the suffering servant passages. He quotes Isaiah 53:9 and echoes other texts from Isaiah 53 in verses 24 and 25 (Isa. 53:12 in 1 Pt. 2:24a; 53:5 in 2:24b; 53:6 in 2:25).

2:24—“He bore our sins in His body on the tree” may be a reference to the scapegoat of Leviticus 16, to other Levitical offerings, or to basic ideas involved in the Old Testament sacrificial system. “By his wounds you are healed” is Peter's poignant application of truth from Isaiah 53 to Christian slaves who had endured unjust physical punishment.

C. Husbands and wives (3:1-7)—Christian wives were to be submissive to their husbands (3:1), chaste and respectful in their behavior and demeanor (3:2), cultivating an inner beauty and quiet spirit very unlike the Roman matriarchs of the day (3:3-4), pointing to a Jewish matriarch noted for her submission (Sarah in 3:6). Husbands were to live considerately and respectfully with their wives as partners in the gracious gift of life (3:7).

The instruction that wives should submit to their husbands occurs in other New Testament texts—Ephesians 5:22; Colossians 3:18; 1 Timothy 2:9-15; and Titus 2:4-5. The purpose of the command in this passage was witness. In Greco-Roman society as well as in Judaism, husbands were always in the

position of authority. Wives were to submit to and obey their husbands, and this obedience usually included allegiance to the husband's religion. This cultural backdrop also included the reality that Christianity spread faster among women than men. Peter's advice has headship in the background but also aims to reduce potential marital tensions and causes for pagan hostility to the faith. Where a man is disobedient to the gospel witness, he may be won to the faith by the lifestyle and demeanor of his wife. The mother of Augustine was a model of this paradigm. She eventually was instrumental in the conversions of both her son and her husband.

3:3-4—Peter's words in this text have been understood as a prohibition of any outward adornment. However, Peter's emphasis is not on prohibition but on a proper sense of value and proportion. If the barn needs painting, paint it. But just as the farmer needs to remember that the task is to care for the farm and not just to paint the barn, so wives should focus on inner beauty.

3:6—Sarah is portrayed as the great model of womanly submission whose respect for her husband extended to her speech. One pauses here. Other aspects of Abraham and Sarah's relationship could suggest a more nuanced application to spousal roles and regard.

3:7—This verse delineates obligations of Christian husbands. Consideration, respect, and general regard as fellow heirs of eternal life populate the spousal plate. Modern readers look askance at Peter's description of wives as the "weaker partner." While the reference is to physical strength and usually true, moderns feel that the tone is demeaning. However, in the culture of that day it certainly was not demeaning, considering the paradigm of the ancient world where women were treated as a secondary form of humanity.

V. Suffering for Doing Good (3:8-4:11)—Peter urges the believers to be a blessing even though they were being maligned. Ancient writers sometimes communicated ideas through special literary forms. One of these was a chiasmus, an inverted parallel structure. Peter uses this form in this text:

A=Your slanderers will be ashamed (3:16)

B=Suffer though innocent, in God's will (3:17)

C=For Christ suffered for the unjust (3:18)

D=Christ triumphed over hostile spirits (3:19)

E=Noah was saved through water of the flood (3:20)

E=You are saved through water of baptism (3:21)

D=Christ triumphed over hostile spirits (3:22)

C=For Christ suffered physically (4:1a)

B=You suffer according to God's will (4:1b-2)

A=Your slanderers will be ashamed (4:3-5)

A. Call to righteous living (3:8-12)— This section transitions the reader from Peter's text on household codes to one on suffering. This initial text speaks of being kind to one another. Peter instructs the believers to live in harmony with one another, to be sympathetic, considerate, and humble. They were not to retaliate when wronged, but bless, pursue peace with others, and speak no evil. They were to learn these new habits of heart and life in the comparatively safe environment of the church itself (3:8) and then applied in the wider world (3:9, 12-16). They were to hold on to a good conscience, meaning a good witness to a puzzled and suspicious world.

Peter quotes from Psalm 34:12-16, a passage pertaining to a believer's proper comportment, to underline his emphasis on non-retaliation. Being gracious to others may lead to longer life and better days here and certainly will lead to inheriting a blessing in the future. On the contrary, a life of evil, strife, and conflict may well be shortened and marred. Christians are to overcome evil with good. They

can be a blessing in such challenging situations because their hope is fixed on something to come that is unassailable and in Someone who is entirely trustworthy.

B. Attitude while suffering for doing good (3:13-17)— Suffering and unjust treatment has been in the background of Peter’s letter up to now. In this section, it comes to the foreground. 1 Peter 3:14b-15 are built on Isaiah 8:12b-13, where the prophet admonished the faithful in Israel not to fear an impending invasion. Reverence for God was to be their concern. Likewise, Peter admonishes his readers not to be afraid of other people but to acknowledge Jesus as Lord. When the center of a person’s life is rightly related to God, he or she can respond properly to the vicissitudes of life. Christian hope should characterize their interaction with their pagan neighbors. Their demeanor should be gentle and respectful from a clear conscience. They were not to fear but sanctify Christ in their hearts and willingly suffer even for doing good.

3:16-17—*Maintain a good conscience*—Conscience comes from two Latin words *con* (with) and *scio* (to know). The believers were to conduct themselves with a clear conscience before their pagan neighbors. Their integrity and honesty served as their strongest shield against the accusations being spread about them. If they were to maintain this good conscience they needed to deal with sin in their own lives and not excuse themselves because of the abusive conduct of their pagan neighbors.

C. Christ’s example: Death of the righteous for the unrighteous (3:18-22)—This passage is about encouraging people who are likely to suffer unjust treatment from human authorities. Innocent suffering puts the followers of the Lord Jesus in the place where Jesus himself has been. Then Peter tells them four new things that seem very strange to us:

- That the Lord Jesus, after his death, made a proclamation to the “spirits in prison.”
- That these spirits had been disobedient in the days of Noah.
- That Noah’s building of an ark to save his family points forward to Christian baptism.
- Christian baptism is less about washing clean and more about the appeal to God of a good conscience.

Wh-a-a-a-a-t is all this about?

Peter is telling the believers that God’s victory over celestial authorities has been announced to them. Their power has been overthrown. These authorities are behind the human authorities repressing the believers. This is an encouraging word to continue in faith and suffer for doing good because, in the end, God’s promise and justice will prevail.

The Jewish book of 1 Enoch is background here. The book traces the woes and problems of the world back to the wicked angels of Genesis 6, spiritual beings who, in the time of Noah, rebelled against God and left their confined space. The book celebrates God’s victory over these beings. Peter is saying that that victory was won by the Lord Jesus and that after his resurrection he announced their judgment. He was made alive in the Spirit, preached to the spirits in prison, ascended to heaven, and is seated at the Father’s right hand. The oppressed believers need not fear anyone for the exalted Christ is for them and at God’s right hand.

3:18-19—There is much disagreement about these verses. Questions abound: Who are the “spirits” to whom Christ made a proclamation? When did this happen? What was its content? Opinions vary:

- Some see Christ descending to the realm of the dead and preaching to Noah’s contemporaries during the interval between his crucifixion and his resurrection.
- Others view these verses as asserting that the pre-existent Christ preaching through Noah to Noah’s sinful generation.
- Still others see Christ as proclaiming to the fallen angels his victory on the cross.

Most commentators favor the last option. Most ancient Jews read Genesis 6:1-3 as referring to fallen angels in Noah's day after the flood (3:20). They were imprisoned (see 2 Pt. 2:4; Jude 6) and Enoch was sent to proclaim God's judgment to them. In this text, the Lord Jesus is the proclaimer of the triumph over them.

3:20-21—Bringing us to God is the link to Noah's ark. Like Noah, the believers had responded to God's message and were trusting the Lord Jesus to bring them to God. The Cross was their ark.

Peter says that the water of the Flood judgment portrays the water of baptism. The saving reality of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus for the person expressing faith is symbolized by baptism. This is not a baptismal regeneration text. The act of faith indicated in baptism, rather than the physical cleansing is what is significant. In addition, the water imagery (flood waters compared to baptismal water) is part of the literary chiasmus noted above.

3:22—Authorities and powers refer to angelic rulers or influencers over the nations. Even the evil powers behind the rulers who repressed the believers were subdued and in submission to the Lord Jesus.

D. Resultant lifestyle: Living for God (4:1-6)— They were arm themselves with the attitude of Christ and be done with the sinful ways of their previous lives (4:1-3).

Illustration—Two pastor friends were sharing over lunch. One commented to the other how similar spiritual darkness was to physical darkness. One's eyes adjust rather rapidly to the lack of light. In like manner, we too easily adjust to spiritual darkness.

They were to live unto God and have a patient attitude toward the pagans who are troubling them (4:4-6). Believers must be patient with those outside the faith even when we do not agree with their lifestyles. Obedience to God's will is focal in this text. Suffering might result in difficult circumstances and even death but that should not hinder their ministry.

“He who has suffered in his body is done with sin” was a proverbial expression linked in thought with Romans 6:6-7: “For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.” By their union with Christ, the believers were to understand that their conversion was a death to sin.

What happened in the Lord Jesus' death and resurrection ushered in a whole new creation. His suffering was behind the suffering of the believers and that suffering meant that they were done with sin. They must not return to their old way of life. People living that way might heap abuse on the believers in the present time, but they will indeed be judged in the future.

4:1-2—“Arm yourselves” borrows a military term instructing soldiers to prepare for battle. Those who have died with Christ metaphorically needed to be prepared to suffer with him.

4:3-4 indicate that the believers were recent converts out of paganism and were not to return to their old ways. The Christian lifestyle of sober and self-controlled living ran counter to the values of pagan society. The scepter of impending judgment provides support to believers as they resist ungodly behavior.

4:6—Who are the dead to whom the gospel was preached? Various views have been suggested:

- Christ, between his crucifixion and his resurrection, went and preached salvation to all the dead.
- Christ, between his crucifixion and his resurrection, went and preached salvation to the just people of Old Testament times.
- The apostles and others on earth preached the gospel to those who were spiritually dead.

- The dead are Christians who had died or had been put to death.

E. Living with the end in view (4:7-11)—Our future hope impinges on our conduct now. The final salvation is set before us to stimulate our faith and encourage us through difficulty. The believers needed be clear-headed and fervent in prayer. Love must characterize their interaction. Such love suffers in silence, bears adversity without complaint, and forgives readily. The believers are encouraged to practice hospitality. They are to utilize their spiritual gifts.

4:8—They were to love one another, overlooking faults and forgiving offenses.

4:9—Hospitality was especially important in the early church due to a lack of suitable public accommodations. Lodging and provisions were to be supplied generously without grumbling.

4:10-11—Peter emphasizes the diversity of gifting in the church and the need for all of them to have expression. Peter only speaks of gifting in categories—speaking gifts and serving gifts, without specifying particular gifts.

VI. Suffering as a Christian (4:12-5:11)—This text speaks of entrusting our souls to God and continue to do good through challenging times. Believers then and now need to think broader than “Lord, get me through this.”

Whereas in early passages Peter was speaking of repressive trials, here it seems that persecution is at hand. Was it Nero’s brutal persecution of Roman Christians that spawned persecutorial flareups in the provinces? We simply do not know.

A. Before a faithful creator (4:12-19)—The believers were to expect and even rejoice in suffering (4:12-14), allowing the furnace of suffering to foster a closer examination of their lives and ministries (4:15-18), and commit themselves again to a faithful Creator and continue to do good (4:19). Suffering is not to be regarded as something foreign to Christian experience but as a refining test. The idea here is that faith tested is better than faith untried. Christians are to rejoice not in suffering for suffering’s sake but that we can share in the Lord Jesus’ suffering and thus will share in his glory. Rejoicing in suffering is an aspect of our identification with Christ. Our rejoicing is with future hope in mind.

The believers needed to see everything that was happening considering the final judgment which was yet to occur. That outcome was not in doubt. The Lord Jesus would vindicate his people. In the meantime, the believers were called to patient endurance, entrusting their lives to God and continuing to bring a fresh sense of goodness, of love, of kindness, of wisdom to their communities, families, and the neighbors they interacted with.

4:16—Believers were first known as Christians at Antioch (Acts 11:26). Early Roman descriptions of Nero’s persecution used “Christian” to describe the followers of the Lord Jesus ruthlessly butchered.

Suffering as a Christian would have a different ring to their ears than to ours. The title Christian, now so common, was just coming into routine use when Peter wrote. It had a weightier meaning that a person would bear the name of the Lord Jesus and necessarily be his representative. Thus, their sufferings were an outgrowth of their union with the Lord Jesus.

4:19—The upshot is that those suffering as a Christian according to the divine will were to commit themselves to the Lord God and continue to do good as Jesus did. A familiar Jewish prayer of the time ended with these lines: “Our lives are committed to your hand, and our souls are in your care.”

Application—One commentator speaks of ten commandments coming out of these verses regarding the Lord’s return:

- Be sober-minded (clear-headed) (4:7);

- Watchful and prayerful (4:8);
- Hospitable (4:9);
- Exercise your spiritual gifts (4:10-11);
- Expect challenging situations (4:12);
- Rejoice in all things (4:13);
- Do not be ashamed of any aspect of the faith (4:15-16);
- Give glory to God (4:16-18);
- Commit yourself to God and continue to do good (4:19).

B. Shepherds of suffering flocks (5:1-4)—Suffering and persecution underlined the need for effective pastoral leadership. The behavior of church leaders in a time of crisis can encourage or seriously discourage the people of God. The elders were to shepherd (*poimainno*) God’s flock. Its meaning embraces protecting, leading, guiding, and spiritually feeding the Lord’s people. Peter instructs shepherds to focus on the needs of the sheep and not on themselves and how they are doing (5:2). They were to look after the sheep, to make sure they were spiritually nourished and cared for, and that they were protected from predators (Ps. 23; Ezek. 34; Lk. 15:3-7; Jn. 10:1-16; Jn. 21:15-19).

It is clear from this passage that the early church put spiritual leadership in the hands of a plurality of elders and not a single person. The leaders are called elders (*presbyteros*), shepherds, and overseers or bishops (*episkopos*), which reveals the interchangeability of the terms for elder and bishop. Elder denotes the dignity of the office and overseer or bishop its function. Elders must be willing to serve, not greedy for money or status, and not lording over the people of the Lord.

5:1—Peter does not invoke his apostleship or issue commands based on apostolic or papal authority. He describes himself as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings, and a sharer with them in the coming glory.

5:4—Peter informs them of a crown of glory which awaits those who faithfully serve as elders. The New Testament describes several crowns to be given to faithful followers of the Lord Jesus:

- The crown of life (Jas. 1:12; Rev. 2:10) given to those who successfully endure trials.
- The crown that will last forever (1 Cor. 9:25) given to those who master, by God’s grace, the old nature.
- The crown of rejoicing (1 Thess. 2:19) given to those who win others.
- The crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8) given to those who long for and are motivated by his appearing.
- The crown of glory (1 Pt. 5:4) given to faithful elders.

Application—The qualities of an effective elder:

- A vital personal relationship with the Lord Jesus. Peter’s advice is a kind of catalog of his own experiences with the Lord Jesus. 1 Peter 5:1 speaks of his being a witness of Christ’s sufferings and takes us to Gethsemane and Calvary. The phrase “the glory to be revealed” takes us to the Transfiguration. 1 Peter 5:2 speaks of being good caregivers of the people of God and brings to mind Peter’s own restoration and charge from the Lord Jesus in John 21:15-19. 1 Peter 5:3, relating to not lording it over the people of God, reminds us of Luke 22:24-30 and the Lord’s dealing with the argument among the disciples about greatness in the Kingdom. 1 Peter 5:5, about being clothed with humility, would take us back to the Upper Room and the Lord washing the feet of the disciples in John 13. Elders must themselves walk with God and be growing in their spiritual lives.
- Loving concern for God’s people—Elders are to feed the people, provide effective oversight,

and be examples to God's people of sincere Christian living.

- Desire to please Christ's alone (5:4)—The office is not about payola, prestige, or status, but self-sacrificing service unto the Lord Jesus.

C. Submission, humility, and watchfulness (5:5-11)— Peter exhorts the believers—humble yourselves, cast your anxiety upon the Lord, be self-controlled and alert, resist the devil, know that you are not alone in suffering, be strong and steadfast in the grace of God. They were to accept and embrace suffering until God provided the way out.

5:6—There is a call to humility, a characteristic that no one in ancient society outside of Christianity regarded as a virtue. Why is it a prime characteristic of Christian leadership? Because it was a prime characteristic of the Lord Jesus. The call to be a humble shepherd is the call to true strength in which one does not have to bully or compel because the work of humble service has forged such a strong bond between shepherd and sheep that the shepherd only needs to walk towards the pasture, and the sheep will follow.

5:7—This is a great text on bringing our worries and anxieties to the Lord Jesus.

5:8-11—Evil is real. The devil, literally “slanderer” carrying the same connotation as an adversarial accuser, stalks the believers’ lives like a lion. Lions were seen as figures for the enemies of God’s people (see Ps. 22:13). The believers were to be self-controlled and alert because the enemy of their souls is active. They were to resist him, standing firm in their faith (5:9), strengthened by God himself (5:10-11).

Seeing our realm in the backdrop of the spiritual realm is helpful in a number of ways. First, it helps us not demonize our opponents. The human authorities are not the real oppressor. The celestial and spiritual authorities are. Here is the gig in our secular environment. Once you get rid of God and any spiritual reality, you get rid of the devil too. Then it is just you and your opponent. You, your friends, your tribe, your country take the good side (the role of God) and your opponents the bad side (the role of the devil and his brood).

It also corrects our overconfidence. For we are no match for the ultimate opponent—the devil. He is a slanderer, insinuating all kinds of maddening falsehood. We want to scream and shout and carry on. We cannot play into his purposes by taking that route. We must be humble, self-controlled, alert, wary of his power but confident in God’s infinitely greater power, and stand firm in faith.

VII. Purpose for Writing; Final Greetings (5:12-14)—Silas was the amanuensis of this letter. He had a good literary education, and Peter seems to have given him some degree of freedom in the wording of the letter. The literary quality of 1 Peter is notably better than that of 2 Peter.

Peter sends greetings from “she who is in Babylon.” Babylon may refer to the historic city in Mesopotamia, to a town by that name in Egypt, or it could be a cryptic reference to Rome. The last option is the best because of the early tradition of Peter’s presence at Rome, because there is no evidence of Peter having been in Mesopotamia or Egypt, and a cryptic reference is understandable in times of persecution or threatened persecution.

2 Peter—Established in the Truth

Introduction—

Authorship—The authorship and canonicity of 2 Peter was disputed in the early centuries of our era. 2 Peter was one of seven New Testament books whose canonicity was in doubt for an extended period (Hebrews, James, 2 & 3 John, Jude, and Revelation were the others). Origen (185-254) was the first church Father to accept Petrine authorship of the book. However, doubt persisted into the fourth century. Those doubts reappeared during the Reformation and are widespread among contemporary scholars today. Arguments against Petrine authorship include:

- Absence of early Church Father recognition. Reply=brevity, governmental persecution, and ancient communication problems explain delayed recognition.
- Different styles of 1 and 2 Peter. Reply=different amanuenses (literary assistants) were used and given latitude.
- Peter's name occurs in connection with some Gnostic literature and therefore there is hesitancy against Petrine claims. Reply=Early church did hesitate but eventually recognized 2 Peter as authentic.
- Familiarity with 2 Peter in the early church was geographically limited. Reply=Early church did hesitate but eventually recognized 2 Peter as authentic.
- Alleged dependence of 2 Peter on Jude. Reply=This dependence is not conclusive. Even so, why couldn't an apostle rely on parts of a letter written by the Lord's half-brother?
- Hellenistic rhetorical style is beyond Peter. Reply=The extent of Peter's exposure to Hellenistic influences is simply unknown. Using this as a primary reason for rejecting Petrine authorship is highly subjective.
- Delay in the Second Coming was not an issue until the second century. Reply=This is not true. The New Testament clearly indicates that near return of the Lord was the expectation of the first century church. Any delay most certainly would be a pastoral issue.
- The writings of Paul mentioned in 3:15-16 were gathered only after Peter had passed away. Reply=There is no need to hypothesize a full corpse of Paul's writing, only the knowledge of some of his writings that were available before Peter's death.

Note other evidence:

- The letter clearly claims to be from the hand of Peter (1:1);
- It recalls the Lord's prediction of Peter's death (1:14);
- It recalls Peter's eyewitness of the Transfiguration (1:16-18);
- It claims to be his second letter (3:1);
- Its teaching rings true.

Date and recipients—2 Peter was written after some of Paul's letters were in circulation and after 1 Peter. The earliest date of composition would be just before Peter's impending death in the mid-60s. Some think the letter may have been posthumously published by one of Peter's followers in the 80s or 90s. The letter was likely written from Rome, the traditional place of Peter's death. It was a circular letter, perhaps intended for the churches addressed in 1 Peter. The recipients were mostly Gentiles new to the faith given the warnings concerning the false teachers. In addition, the vices that threatened the new believers were more typical of Gentiles than Jews.

Occasion—Peter realized his time was short and that there were many dangers facing the churches. They needed to be wary of greedy teachers peddling falsehood and living immorally. Who were these

opponents? We speculate based on what Peter and Jude say about them. They may have been first century proto-Gnostics or Jews scattered from Palestine and completely overtaken by eclectic Greek thought. The believers needed to be discerning, hold to the truth, and grow in grace.

Similarities between 2 Peter and Jude—The material common to these two letters mostly relates to the description and denunciation of the false teachers. Most scholars think 2 Peter is dependent on Jude and some of these scholars make that an argument for denying Petrine authorship. However—

- Dependence of 2 Peter on Jude is not a certainty. In fact, there are commentators who argue the opposite and others who say that the two letters use a common source.
- The exact date of Jude is uncertain. It may have been written in the 60s and thus available to Peter.
- Peter seems to have used catechetical material in 1 Peter, so why not in 2 Peter as well? The idea that an apostle could not or would not utilize a well-articulated argument in another source, and that written by the Lord's half-brother, is hardly a definitive argument for denying Petrine authorship.

Summary Outline: 2 Peter—Established in the Truth

- I. Salutation and blessing; Exhortation to grow in Christian virtue (1:1-11)
 - A. Salutation and blessing (1:1-4)
 - B. Growing in Christian graces (1:5-11)
 1. Essential Christian virtues (1:5-9)
 2. Making your calling and election sure (1:10-11)
- II. Purpose and authority in writing (1:12-21)
 - A. Need for reminders of the truth (1:12-15)
 - B. Reliability of eyewitness testimony (1:16-18)
 - B. Reliability of prophetic word (1:19-21)
- III. Warning against false teachers; their futile teaching and assured destination (2:1-22)
 - A. Warning against false teachers (2:1-3)
 - B. Examples of previous judgments (2:4-10a)
 - C. Their insolence and wantonness (2:11-16)
 - D. Their vacuous teaching (2:17-22)
- IV. Day of the Lord (3:1-18)
 - A. Certainty and description of the Day of the Lord (3:1-10)
 - B. Encouragement to wholesome thinking and living (3:11-18)

2 Peter—Established in the Truth

I. Salutation and blessing; Exhortation to grow in Christian virtue (1:1-11)—This section contains a salutation and blessing (1:1-4), a description of Christian virtues to grow (1:5-9), and an exhortation for the believers to make their calling and election sure (1:10-11).

God has given us everything we need for all we need to become (1:3). He wants nothing less for us than that we should come to share his very own nature (1:4). Growing in the grace described in 1:5-9 provides confidence before the Lord of his work in us. God has indeed called and chosen those who find themselves following the Lord Jesus.

A. Salutation and blessing (1:1-4)— The best Greek manuscripts spell “Simon” as Symeon”. Some commentators see this detail as supporting Petrine authorship for a pseudonymous author would likely have used the more common spelling. Whoever the recipients, a relationship of some duration with the author is clear in 1:12-15, where Peter expresses his desire to refresh their memory of key Christian truth before he graduates to glory. Applying the title “God and Savior” to the Lord Jesus in the initial verse is a clear statement of the divinity of the Lord Jesus.

1:4—How do Christians participate in the divine nature? Western Christians are sometimes uncomfortable with this idea of participating in the divine nature as lacking humility or even somewhat blasphemous. In the East, this idea is described as *theosis* and understood as central to being a Christian. In coming to know God through the Lord Jesus, believers escape the corruption of sin and lustful desires as the Lord Jesus renews and restores the image of God in them.

The false teachers were living dissipated lives and encouraging people to follow them into the mire. Peter tells the recipients and us that we must run from evil desires if we are to participate in the divine nature. Lust drags us down to a subhuman level. It is a drug that always demands more and delivers less. It turns people into shadows of authentic human beings. The father's advice in Proverbs 6 is to stay away from immorality because it reduces you to a loaf of bread and preys on your very life (see Prov. 6:25-26). Lust does to moral fiber what cancer does to physical cells.

B. Growing in Christian graces (1:5-11)— Peter speaks of effort necessary for Christian fruitfulness (1:5-9) and for confirmation of their calling and election (1:10-11).

1. Essential Christian virtues (1:5-9)— Peter urgently calls for progressive growth in the faith. We are saved by grace alone, but this faith does not continue by itself. Peter lists virtues to add to their lives starting with faith and ending with love. The believers were to “make every effort,” that is to be zealous and serious about growing up in the Lord. The virtues include—

- Goodness (*arete*) here means moral excellence.
- Knowledge (*gnosis*) is to advance into knowing the will of God. Peter's concern is for practical knowledge or discernment.
- Self-control (*egkrateia*) is the activity of the Spirit within a believer that puts to death the misdeeds of the flesh. It is the opposite of the greed and sexual license of the false teachers and pagan populace. It is enjoying the proper pleasures of life with grace and moderation.
- Perseverance or patience (*hupomone*) is the ability to continue in the faith and resist the pressures of the world system. It is hanging in there while handling the pressures and problems of life.
- Godliness (*eusebeia*) or piety is devotion to God. This is the practical awareness of God in every aspect of life. It is a wonderful grace that the world system regularly slanders.
- Brotherly kindness (*philadelphia*) denotes the warmth of affection that should characterize the

fellowship of believers.

- Love (*agape*) is the queen of virtues and denotes self-sacrificing action on behalf of others.

Adding one virtue (or vice) to a former one in these kinds of lists was a standard ancient literary technique.

2. Making your calling and election sure (1:10-11)—Peter exhorts the believers to make their calling and election sure. By growing in grace, a believer becomes assured of his or her calling and election by the Lord God. “Never fall” does not refer to a loss of salvation but to suffering spiritual reverses or misfortunes. Note the eschatological hope operates to provide perseverance through challenging times. Future hope pushes us to the present to live more consistently for Christ.

II. Purpose and authority in writing (1:12-21)—Aware that his remaining time is short, Peter seeks to encourage believers to remember and live according to the truth (1:12-15). He himself is an eyewitness of key events which served to make Old Testament prophecy sure. The Lord Jesus, his coming, transfiguration, death, and resurrection (1:16-18) confirmed the prophetic word (1:19-21). The believers were to hold on to these until the day when Jesus reappears and ushers in God's new order.

A. Need for reminders of the truth (1:12-15)—It's essential to continually remind ourselves of the truth so that it becomes the foundation for motivation and putting these principles into practice in our daily lives. Peter knows that his time is short, and he wants the believers to continue in the truth.

1:13—Several ancient texts compared the body to a tent as Peter does here.

1:15—What does he mean by “I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things?” Was he referring to the written form of his teaching in 1 and 2 Peter? Was he referring to the Gospel of Mark, Mark being a close associate of Peter?

B. Reliability of eyewitness testimony (1:16-18)—Peter certifies that the message is based on his own eyewitness experience of Jesus and on hearing the Father's attestation of the Son. The false teachers may have been pooh-poohing the Incarnation, Resurrection, and the coming kingdom, saying they were fabrications. Peter saw the glorified Christ at the Transfiguration (Mt. 17:1-9; Mk. 9:2-10; Lk. 9:28-36), he heard the Father's voice. The transfiguration prefigured the Second Coming. In this text, Peter seems to parallel his own witness of the Lord Jesus' glory with Moses' witness of God's glory on Mount Sinai.

C. Reliability of prophetic word (1:19-21)—The prophetic text has often seemed untidy and confusing to Bible students, but with the Jesus revelation of glory in the transfiguration and his resurrection the time had arrived or so many thought. No one imagined that there would be a further time lag between Messiah's first appearance and his final one. Peter will explain that delay from the Scriptures and provide counsel for the believers about what they should be doing in the meantime.

The Old Testament prophets spoke of these things and their words are made more certain because the Transfiguration was a foretaste of the fulfillment of the coming glory and kingdom. The apostolic eyewitness testimony confirms the revelations of the Old Testament prophets. Peter compares the prophetic witness as a “light shining in a dark place” and urges believers to pay careful attention to it.

1:20—Peter says that the prophetic text did not come into being through the prophet's own interpretation (e.g. of one's own unloosing). Wh-a-a-a-t is this about? Three major views have been suggested—

- Interpretation is not to be a private “gig” of individual believers but of the church itself according to the analogy of faith (that is, considering the full Scriptural witness);
- No prophecy was only a matter of the prophet's own fabrication;

- “Interpretation” refers to the origination of the prophetic text.

1:21—This text speaks to the confluence of the human and the divine in the origination of the prophetic text. People moved by the Spirit spoke from God. Behind the literary genres, the various authors through the ages, was the Holy Spirit, not bypassing human minds, writing styles, personalities, and situations, but working through them to breathe God's word through human words. The text was not the result of divine dictation or prophetic ecstasy but written by human beings in their distinctive styles as guided by the Spirit in such a way that God was pleased to call the end-product his Word.

III. Warning against false teachers; their futile teaching and assured destination (2:1-22)—

This section warns the believers against false teachers (2:1-3), provides examples of previous judgments of God on ungodliness (2:4-10a), describes the insolence and wantonness of the false teachers (2:10b-16), and the impotence and vacuousness of their teaching (2:17-22).

A. Warning against false teachers (2:1-3)—In contrast to the inspired prophets of 1 Peter 1:20-21, the false teachers spoke visions from their own minds instead of from God's mind and heart. The focal point of the error was Christological; “they denied the sovereign Lord who bought them” (2:1). They and their followers brought the truth into disrepute by their shameful ways (2:2). The faith itself was commercialized. The false teachers exploited the people of the Lord Jesus (2:3).

False teachers in every age are better known by what they deny than what they affirm. Historically, they have denied, among other things, the inspiration of Scripture, the sinfulness of humanity, the atoning death of the Lord Jesus, the deity and/or the humanity of the Lord Jesus, salvation by faith, and the reality of judgment. Peter exposes the false teachers of his day as sensualists. They yearned to satisfy their own lusts. Their disciples followed in this waywardness. Finally, they were greedy. It was all about the money. Religion can be a tremendous tool for monetary exploitation. The false teachers in Peter’s day were not ministers but merchandisers.

2:1—”[D]enying the sovereign Lord who bought them” is a difficult phrase. It appears that persons bought by the Lord Jesus are lost. Various interpretations have been suggested—

- The false teachers were redeemed but fell away and lost their salvation.
- The word “bought” or “redeemed” (*agarazo*) should be taken in the sense of temporal deliverance. It is not used as relating to salvation.
- Christ “bought” the false teachers in that his propitiation for sin on the cross was for the sins of the whole world (1 Jn. 2:2). However, the benefits of that propitiation were never applied to the false teachers because of their failure to believe and trust the Lord. This is the unlimited atonement, limited redemption understanding of Christ’s saving work of the cross.

2:3—Traveling diviners, false prophets, and moral teachers typically charged fees or even begged funds and were frequently accused of unworthy monetary motives.

B. Examples of previous judgments (2:4-10a)—2 Peter 4-9 is one long sentence in the original language. In it, Peter gives three examples of the Lord’s judgment of ungodliness: judgment on the fallen angels, probably a reference to the unusual passage in Genesis 6 (2:4), the Flood judgement (2:5), referred to in 1 Peter 3:18-22 and again in 2 Peter 3, and the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah (2:6-8). Peter then states his main point in this text, that the Lord knows how to rescue godly people from trials (2:9). Suffering believers anywhere and at any time can find consolation that the Lord knows all about their plight. The section concludes with the assurance that God’s judgment will fall on the false teachers of Peter’s day (2:10a).

2:4—The angels are likely the fallen angels of Genesis 6. Ancient Jewish tradition commonly asserted
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that the “sons of God” in Genesis 6:1-3 were angels who lusted after women and so fell from glory. The three examples Peter uses all come one after another in the early chapters of Genesis, and the reference to the fallen angels confined to gloomy dungeons fits their offense in Genesis 6. The term “put into gloomy dungeons” has also been translated “cast into hell” and comes from the Greek *tartarus*, a place for holding the wicked dead and of severe torture. Some Bible students think this text refers to the fall of Lucifer described in Isaiah 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28:11-15.

2:5-6—Noah stories, like that of the fallen angels were popular in nonrabbinic Judaism. The judgment on the fallen angels was linked with the flood judgment on Noah's generation because Genesis 6 recounted both. The flood judgment was frequently cited by Jewish teachers as an example of impending judgment to warn their own generation to repent. Jewish teachers also often coupled Sodom and Gomorrah with the flood generation as epitomes of wickedness as Peter does in this text.

2:7-8—Peter's description of Lot as righteous is puzzling because in Genesis Lot is not notable for his stalwart character. He seems worldly and weak. However, Peter does say that Lot was tormented and distressed by the filthy lives of his fellow citizens. Nevertheless, Lot stayed and made his home in Sodom and had to be dragged out of there before its destruction.

C. Their insolence and wantonness (2:11-16)— The false teachers are presumptuous and self-willed. They respect no one and nothing restrains them (2:10). In their massive, willful ignorance they are not afraid to slander celestial beings (2:11). They carouse in broad daylight (2:13), desire to turn church meetings into times of dissipation, looking to seduce unstable women (2:14). They resemble the ancient prophet Balaam (see Num. 22-24) in their greed and avarice (2:15-16).

2:11-12— The false teachers were arrogant and self-willed, a charge supported by evidence that strikes us as very strange—they blasphemed angels. In Jewish tradition, the fountainhead of all rebellion against God in heaven and earth, is the rejection of proper authority. The false teachers demonstrated this strait in posturing against heavenly beings vastly superior to them. The description grows ever more damning—they were like brute beasts, their willful sin making them almost sub-human.

2:13-14—They lived riotous lives. They lived luxuriously at the expense of those they were fleecing. They caroused in broad daylight. They intruded on church services in vile ways, reveling in their pleasures, looking for unstable people to seduce. Peter describes them as experts in greed. They never stopped sinning because they could not stop. They baited others to follow in their ways. Freedom and self-fulfillment were top drawer bait items, then and now.

2:15-16— Peter compares the false teachers to Balaam (Num. 22-24). Balaam was a dishonorable and greedy prophet. For the right price, he trapped the Israelites into cultic prostitution leading to God's judgment on them and to his own death (Num. 31:8; Josh. 13:22). The contrast between the “way of Balaam” and the “right way” reflects the ancient image of two paths, the wise path to life and the foolish one to destruction. Balaam's waywardness was particularly foolish and greedy. Despite a miraculous warning (being rebuked by a talking ass) he proceeded with his folly.

D. Their vacuous teaching (2:17-22)— The false teachers offered a bogus freedom based on false promises (2:17-18), offered by themselves, false Christians and teachers (2:19-20), and involving false experiences (2:21-22).

The descriptions in the last paragraph of this section are particularly vivid. These false teachers are described as making promises and not delivering, as boastful and lustful, as enticing and binding unstable people in immoral situations, as promising freedom to others although they themselves were enslaved to depravity, as sows returning to the mud, and as dogs lapping up their own vomit. Note the vivid expressions to describe the emptiness of the apostates' promises:

- Springs without water (2:17)—Rather than flowing streams they were like dry waterbeds.
- Mists driven by the storm—Other translations say, “clouds driven by the tempest.” Much needed rain looked like it had arrived, but it delivered nothing.
- Black darkness is reserved for them. The false teachers do not deliver light or insight, but muddled confusion. They attract by boastful words and by the sly appeal to base appetites, focused on immature believers. They deceitfully craft their appeal to sound good to those lacking discernment.

2:20-22—Again, these verses are troubling. Does the pronoun “they” relate to the false teachers? If so, which is likely, does 1 Peter 2:20 suggest that Christians can lose their salvation? The verse mentions the possibility of reverting to old pagan ways after having escaped the corruptions of the world through knowing the Lord Jesus. Note that the text only asserts an escape from worldly corruption for a time without affirming that the people were genuine believers. When Peter says that they are worse off at the end than in the beginning, the reference is to a lost apostate. Given their obvious reprobate disposition, what Peter seems to be saying is that these false teachers were around Christian witness but rejected it and returned to the ways of world with gusto.

Peter concludes this strong denunciation with two proverbs, one from Scripture (Prov. 26:11) and one extrabiblical reference. The images are vivid—sows returning to their mud and dogs lapping up their own vomit. Dogs and pigs were unclean animals here described as engaged in disgusting activities common to their nature.

IV. Day of the Lord (3:1-18)—This section relates to the certainty of the Day of the Lord (3:1-10) and encourages the believers to wholesome thinking and living (3:11-18).

A. Certainty and description of the Day of the Lord (3:1-10)—The last days are the days between the Lord’s two comings. The scoffers are the false teachers. The believers are warned that there will be scoffers in the last days who deny biblical truths and live in carnal ways. They will mock any idea of the second coming and make a naturalistic argument that rules out any divine intervention in history.

Peter relies by pointing out that the scoffers deliberately forget or deny God’s past intervention, specifically the flood judgment and God’s prior activity of creation. Peter’s second argument is that “delay” is a relative idea for a thousand years is as one year to the Lord (3:8, with Psalm 90:4 in the backdrop). The Lord’s redemptive patience is behind his delay in returning (3:9), not wanting anyone to perish but all to come to repentance. This is not a text teaching universal salvation. Calvin’s comment is apropos, that God’s love for humanity is so wonderful that he wants all to be saved. However, this “all” is his will of desire, not his will of decree. Finally, Peter affirms that the Day of the Lord will come suddenly as unexpected as that of a thief (3:10).

3:6-7—God promised after the flood judgment (Gen. 6-9) never to destroy the earth by water again (Gen. 9:15). However, the prophets did speak of a future fiery judgment and the renewal of the present world (see Isa. 65:17; 66:15, 22). Jewish literature of the day sometimes used the flood as a symbol for future judgment by fire.

3:8-9—Peter draws on language in Psalm 90:4 to make his point that God’s timing is different from ours. He informs us that God does not operate on our time schedules and cannot be boxed into our chronologies. The upshot is patience, both with one another in our daily relations and on a cosmic scale as well. We need to translate God’s delay into concerted action. His delay is our moment of fresh vocation.

3:10-11—The Day of the Lord is a familiar Old Testament image for the future judgment. That Day’s
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coming as a thief refers to Jesus' comment in Matthew 24:43. Note how Peter's discussion of future judgment does not engage in speculation but is eminently practical. Future hope drives us to the present to live righteously now. Those suffering in the present order can embrace apocalyptic hope, which gives them strength to persevere amid seeming insurmountable trials.

B. Encouragement to wholesome thinking and living (3:11-18)— Peter gives three admonitions to encourage the believers in Christian diligence considering the Lord's return. They are to be diligent to live pious lives (3:11-14), to win the lost (3:15-16), and to grow in grace (3:17-18).

The impending disintegration of the world becomes the ground Peter uses in his challenge to the believers. In view of the end, how should they live? Peter recognizes that the lack of expectation of future judgment often led to immoral behavior or moral relativism. Here is a paradigm for End Times teaching—not speculation about how it will happen but exhortation pushing us back to the present to live hopefully and obediently now. Peter reminds the believers again that the purpose of the Lord's delay in returning is for the salvation of people. Some will deliberately confuse the Lord's patience with slackness. Christians should count it to the Lord's redemptive desire. God's patience is our opportunity. When he waits patiently to act, it is for the purpose of redemptive mercy. He intends to renew all things but waits for a redemptive in-gathering.

Through it all, the believers were to be on their guard. There were lawless people out there, ready to lead them astray. They were to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus. It was their privilege and their birthright.

3:15-16—Peter notes how false teachers had distorted Paul's teaching as they did with “other Scriptures”. Were the believers counting Paul's writings as “Scripture” even at this early date? That is indeed the straightforward understanding of this text. By the late first century, another early Christian writer (in 1 Clement) asserted the inspiration of Paul's letters. Some scholars have used this text to argue for a post-Petrine date for 2 Peter. However, there is no need to see this text as referring to the complete corpus of Paul writings, but just to some of them of which Peter could and would have been aware during his lifetime.

Note Peter's warning about the irresponsible use of the biblical text. Correct exegesis must always be a continuing concern for the church and for anyone who opens the Word of God for others.

3:17-18—There is a need to guard against error and to grow in grace. First, there is the reminder to watch out lest the false teachers lead them astray. Guarding against false teaching involves—

- A prior knowledge of the false teachers' activities;
- Warning against their immoral ways;
- Teaching the historic apostolic message;
- Understanding prophetic teaching;
- Remembering judgment and future hope and living in the present in view of the future.

Second, Peter exhorts them to grow in grace. The believers needed to keep moving forward. They needed to progress in faith, or they would regress and fall back.

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