# Faith Foundations Study Guides

# **Contending for the Faith**

A Journey of Discovery in the Books of Jude and 2 Peter

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## How to Use This Book

Welcome to the Faith Foundations study guide on Jude and 2 Peter! Whether you are just beginning your new life with Christ, or have been a Christian for many years, this study guide is for you. It is designed to help you discover, through personal study and group discussion, the incredible riches of God's Word, and to help you grow in your walk with God by applying what you learn. This book is divided into 8 lessons, each of which contains the full NIV text of the Scripture passage, several study and discussion questions, and a verse-by-verse commentary. So, together with a Bible to look up cross-references, you have everything you need for your "journey of discovery" in Jude and 2 Peter.

#### Why Small Groups?

These materials can be used profitably in personal study or in an adult Sunday School class. But their value will be best realized when they are used in small groups, meeting either at church during the Sunday School hour or in homes during the week. There are several reasons for this.

First, no one has perfect insight into every passage of Scripture; we can all benefit from hearing the perspectives of other believers as we seek to understand and apply the Bible. A small group gathering, using the discussion questions included in this book, is an ideal way to stimulate a sharing of observations and ideas.

Second, a small group provides a community of fellow travelers who, along with us, are seeking to follow Christ in the midst of family responsibilities, job pressures, and personal struggles. In today's fragmented and mobile society, the natural networks of neighborhoods and family no longer provide the support they once did. We need some way of making connections with others for mutual support, people with whom we can share our joys and sorrows—people who will listen, who will pray with us, who will offer a helping hand and a word of encouragement, and who will confront us in love when we've gotten off track.

Finally, a small group combines the benefits of Biblical insight and community support by keeping us accountable. If we only study the Scriptures alone, or listen to them taught in a large group, it's easy to let them go "in one ear and out the other". But when a small group of people are learning the same things at the same time, they can help one another to apply the things they are learning.

#### How Are the Groups Organized?

The groups should be composed of 6-14 people: if they are smaller, any absences can make it difficult to maintain the discussion; if they are larger, not everyone can participate. You can meet from two to four times a month; if the group meets less than twice a month, the members aren't spending enough time together to build relationships. Some groups find that meeting three times a month during the school year, with a break during the summer, provides a good rhythm of involvement and time off.

You may choose to include a mix of married and single, older and younger members, or you may organize your groups by age or marital status. There are benefits to homogeneous groups in which the members are going through similar life experiences, but there are also benefits of a diverse group in which the younger members can benefit from the experience of the older.

Each group needs to have a recognized leader, preferably one selected and trained by the pastor or church leadership. This person's role during the meeting is not primarily to teach (although preparation of the lesson is a must), but to guide the discussion and keep the group from getting bogged down on side issues. He or she does not need to be the host; in fact, it is preferable that group responsibilities, such as providing a home in which to meet and organizing refreshments, be shared among the members.

Finally, membership in the group should be based on three commitments: To prepare for each meeting by completing the lesson in advance, which takes from 1/2 to 2 hours (but come to the meeting even if you haven't done the lesson); to place a high priority on regular attendance and come to the meetings except in case of emergency; and to keep confidential anything of a personal nature which is shared during the meetings (except when it is necessary to communicate concerns to the pastor).

#### What Is the Group Meeting Like?

Each group meeting should last from 1 1/2 to 2 hours, and provide time for discussion of the lesson, prayer, and fellowship. A problem in many groups is for the lesson to take up most of the time, with only a few minutes left over for prayer and fellowship. This must be avoided for the goal of building relationships to be achieved.

Here is a suggested schedule:

15 minutes: Gathering

30-45 minutes: Discussion of the lesson

20-30 minutes: Prayer 15-30 minutes: Refreshments

As for child care, experience has shown that in order to receive the maximum benefit from time spent in the meeting, all members of the group need to be free to focus on the discussion, rather than caring for children. Therefore, with the possible exception of infants under one year, parents should make arrangements for child care during the meetings. Some options include "trading" child care with parents whose group meets on a different night, having a baby sitter care for children in another room during the meeting, or providing child care for all the groups at the church.

## Introduction to Jude

#### **Author**

The author identifies himself as "Jude" (Greek Judas). This was a fairly common name; however he also informs us that he was the "brother of James". The only James who was so well-known that he could be identified simply by his given name would be the brother of Jesus (Mt. 13:55; Mk. 6:3; Gal. 1:19), who was a leader in the Jerusalem church (Acts 12:17; 15:13-21; 21:17-19; Gal. 2:9). This tells us that Jude was a brother of Christ as well. However, he makes no mention of this, referring to himself only as a "servant" of Jesus Christ. This was likely due to the fact that, unlike members of ancient political dynasties, the relatives of Christ possessed no special status in the church due to their lineage. Instead, their relationship with Christ and his followers was based on a shared faith (Mt. 12:46-49; Mk. 3:31-35; Lk. 11:27-28). The Scriptures tell us that the brothers of Christ came to faith after the resurrection (Acts 1:14; 1 Cor. 9:5).

This Jude is not to be confused with other men of the same name mentioned in the New Testament: Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus and committed suicide (Mt. 10:4; 27:5), and Judas son of James (Lk. 6:16; Jn. 14:22), both of whom were among Jesus' twelve disciples. Nor is he the same as Judas Barsabbas (Acts 15:22-32).

#### **Date and Place of Writing**

The book of 2 Peter shows clear evidence of dependence on Jude, which would indicate that Jude was written prior to Peter's death. Tradition tells us that the apostle Peter was martyred under the Roman emperor Nero, who himself died in A.D. 68. This would put the composition of Jude sometime prior to that date.

Some have argued that the references to the past; i.e., "the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (v. 3) and the call to remember what "the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold" (v. 17), indicate a long separation in time between the days of the apostles and the time of the epistle. However, references to "the faith" occur frequently in Paul's Pastoral Epistles, which are usually dated in A.D. 60-68. Also, the fact that the apostles were no longer present in the community to which Jude is writing doesn't necessarily indicate that they had died; it could simply mean that, having planted and established this church, they had moved on to another place of ministry. Even if Jude is speaking of apostles who had died, a date in the 60's is still quite possible, as several had likely passed from the scene by that time.

Concerning the place from which Jude was written, no firm conclusions can be drawn. The arguments for one location or another tend to rely on circumstantial evidence, such as the area where this letter was first widely accepted by the church (Egypt), or the high quality of the Greek that is used, indicating that the author was writing from a place with an established Greek culture and educational opportunities.

#### **Destination and Recipients**

Jude does not specify the group or church he is writing to, referring to them simply as "those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ" (v. 1). However, since Jude and James were known and respected in Palestine, the author's sparse self-identification would suggest that the book was written to persons living in or near that area, who would need no further introduction.

#### **Occasion and Purpose**

Jude writes with a dual purpose: to warn against heretics, who have infiltrated this Christian community with their false teaching and immoral behavior, and to stir up the church to defend the truth, rescuing those who are in danger of being drawn into fatal error. To this end, he exposes the character of these godless men, detailing their sins — licentious conduct, rebellion against authority, slander, greed, selfishness, grumbling, pride, divisiveness — and likens them to notorious evildoers from the Old Testament. The central falsehood of their ministry appears to have been lawlessness; i.e., the idea that Christians, having been released from obligation to keep the Jewish law, were not bound by any moral code. Jude warns his readers of the ultimate fate of these corrupt and evil men, and of any who would follow them: condemnation, destruction, and the "punishment of eternal fire" (v. 7).

In response to this, the people of God are to "contend for the faith" (v. 3), building themselves up and keeping themselves in God's love (vv. 20-21), and working to rescue those who have gone astray or who are at risk of doing so (vv. 22-23). They can do this with confidence, knowing that God's power is sufficient to "keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy" (v. 24).

# Unit 1 – A Warning Jude 1:1-8

# **Text**

llove Chri abu writ had ceri abc gra	1 Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a ther of James, To those who have been called, who are ed by God the Father and kept by a Jesus rist:  2 Mercy, peace and love be yours in undance.  3 Dear friends, although I was very eager to the to you about the salvation we share, I felt I do to write and urge you to contend for the faith the twas once for all entrusted to the saints. For tain men whose condemnation was written but b long ago have secretly slipped in among and the the condition of the saints. They are godless men, who change the condition of the saints our only Sovereign and Lord.	<sup>5</sup> Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord <sup>c</sup> delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. <sup>6</sup> And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. <sup>7</sup> In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire. <sup>8</sup> In the very same way, these dreamers pollute their own bodies, reject authority and slander celestial beings. <sup>a</sup> 1 Or for; or in <sup>b</sup> 4 Or men who were marked out for condemnation <sup>c</sup> 5 Some early manuscripts Jesus
0	pen	
	Do you have a good memory? What sort of things are easy for you to remember? Difficult to remember?	☐ What are some of your earliest memories of childhood?
D	iscover	
1.	What does the author of this book tell us about his himself as one of the brothers of Christ? (see Luke	
2.	What are the three ways in which Jude describes hanother? (see Romans 8:28-30)	nis readers? (v. 1) How are these related to one
3.	Why did he feel a need to write to them? (vv. 3-4)	

4.	What five things were the false teachers guilty of? (vv. 4, 8)
5.	How might someone "change the grace of God into a license for immorality?" (v. 4; see Romans 3:8;
J.	6:1; Galatians 5:13; 1 Peter 2:16)
6.	<b>Meditation question</b> : Have you ever been guilty of this? In other words, have you ever presumed upon God's grace? What was the result?
7.	What do these three examples have in common: the Exodus generation (v. 5), fallen angels (v. 6), Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 7)?
8.	What was the sin of the fallen angels? (v. 6; see Gen. 6:1-4) What was the result?
9.	What was the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah? (v. 7; see Genesis 13:13; 19:1-11). What was the result? (see Luke 17:29)
A	pply
	How does our culture's attitude toward sexual conduct compare to the attitude expressed in this passage?  How does your own attitude toward sexual conduct compare to the attitude expressed in this passage?

"Jude . . . " The opening of this short epistle v 1 follows the standard form of an ancient letter. in which the author begins by identifying himself and the intended recipients, and expresses a prayer or wish for their wellbeing. Although "Jude" was a common name, it is qualified by the self-designations "servant of Jesus Christ" and "brother of James". Few people named "James" would have been so well-known that they could be identified solely by their given name, thus the second of these phrases likely refers to the James who was a leader in the Jerusalem church (Acts 12:17; 15:13-21; 21:17-19; Gal. 2:9). James was also a brother of Jesus (Mt. 13:55; Mk. 6:3; Gal. 1:19) and the author of the New Testament epistle which bears his name. This reference suggests that Jude was a lesser figure than James, and so is invoking their family relationship to lend authority to his own writing.

Since this relationship to James would make Jude a brother of Christ as well (or, more accurately, a half-brother, since his father was Joseph rather than the Holy Spirit), why doesn't he mention it? First, this fact was likely so widely known as not to require mention. But more significantly, the family members of Christ who had become his disciples had no special claim on him due to physical birth; their relationship with him was based on faith, as it is for every other believer (see Mt. 12:46-49; 25:40; 28:10; Mk. 3:31-35; Lk. 8:19-21; 11:27-28). Thus, Jude refers to himself only as a "servant" of Christ, reflecting his conversion from one who initially rejected Jesus' claims (Mt. 13:57; Mk. 3:21; Jn. 7:3-5) to one who became a follower of Christ after the resurrection (Acts 1:14; 1 Cor. 9:5).

The term "servant" (or "slave", see 1 Cor. 7:22-23) carries the idea of humility, but also of imputed authority. Although the slave has no personal rank or status, he is invested with the authority of the one whom he or she serves. And so this term represents an implied claim to speak on behalf of Christ, as one who has been entrusted with the things of God (see 1:3; also Mt. 25:14; 1 Cor. 4:1; Gal. 2:7; 1 Thess. 2:4; 1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:14; Titus 1:7). The apostles Paul and John also refer to themselves and to other believers in this way (Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10; 2 Tim. 2:24; Col. 4:12; Rev. 1:1).

"To those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ" This incorporates the past, present, and future aspects of God's sovereign choice to call into existence a people for himself (Acts 15:13-14; Titus 2:14). These descriptive terms – "called", "loved", and "kept" – are inseparable links in a chain of salvation (Rom. 8:28-30): those who are called are the ones upon whom God has set his love, and these also will be

brought to faith and kept in the faith by God's power until the end (John 10:27-29; 17:6-12; 1 Cor. 1:8-9; 1 Thess. 5:23-24; 2 Tim. 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:10).

v. 3 "I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints." Jude had originally planned to write a letter on a different topic. However, due to the seriousness and urgency of the matter at hand, he feels constrained to set that project aside. The catalyst for his change in plans would have been the emergence of false teachers in the midst of the community to which he is writing (v. 4).

The term rendered "contend" is used elsewhere to describe an intense struggle, either in athletics or warfare. That for which they must do battle is the "faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints," i.e. the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. Jude is seeking, not merely to correct the faulty doctrine they are being taught, but to stir them up to forcefully refute it themselves; he is seeking action, not merely agreement or enlightenment.

The phrase "once for all" makes clear that this body of doctrine has now been established; it is not subject to revision or embellishment due to new information or altered circumstances (see Gal. 1:8)

v. 4 "... men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you." The final end of these despicable characters has been decreed from ages past; thus, they will certainly not escape condemnation, and none should be so foolish as to follow them in their deadly error. The writings that Jude is referring to are likely Old Testament prophecies concerning the fate of the wicked (for example, Job 20:28-29; Ps. 1:4-6; 11:5-6; 37:1-40; 55:23; 58:9-10; 92:7; 94:23; Prov. 11:23; 16:4; Isa. 3:11; 11:4; 13:11; Jer. 23:19; 25:31).

"They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality" The glorious truth that our salvation is not dependent on our own merit (Rom. 3:28; Eph. 2:8-9; 2 Tim. 1:9) can be, and has been, perverted by the cynical and ungodly into a free pass for all kinds of sin. Here, the false teachers were arguing for a "freedom" to engage in sexual debauchery. As Paul wrote of such people, "Their condemnation is deserved." (Rom. 3:8; see Rom. 6:1; Gal. 5:13; 1 Pet. 2:16; 2 Pet. 2:19). The statement that they "deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord' could mean that they openly renounced Christ; however, it is more likely that James is referring to the implicit rejection of Christ's authority which their sinful lifestyles represented (see Tit. 1:16).

- v. 5-8 In these verses, Jude provides three examples from the Old Testament of those who sinned against God, and who were harshly judged as a result: the exodus generation, the fallen angels, and the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. In each case, the prior blessings they had received from God's hand, and the privileged position they enjoyed, did not exempt them from the terrible consequences of their rebellion. In the same way, Jude is warning his readers that following the false teachers in their erroneous doctrines and practices will bring about their own rejection by God; they will be destroyed (i.e., eternally lost) along with those who are leading them astray.
- v. 5 "Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe." This is not new information; Jude's readers are familiar with the fate of those who refused to enter the land of Canaan due to unbelief. As a result, they were forced to wander in the desert for forty years, until a whole generation had perished (Num. 14:1-35, esp. vv. 26-30; also Ps. 106:24-27; 1 Cor. 10:1-5; Heb. 3:7-19). The fact that God worked in a miraculous way to rescue the Hebrews from slavery did not protect those who later turned away from him.

In some early manuscripts of Jude, the one who accomplished the escape from Egypt is identified, not as "the Lord", but as "Jesus". If this reading is accurate, it emphasizes the unity of the Godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), and the fact that the pre-incarnate Christ, the eternal second Person of the Trinity, was present and active among the people of Israel during this time (see 1 Cor. 10:4; also, Jn. 1:1-3; 8:56-58; 12:41; Heb. 11:26).

v. 6 "And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day." This refers to a traditional belief concerning fallen angels; one that is mentioned only in passing in the Old Testament, but developed more fully in other extra-Biblical Jewish literature, such as 1 Enoch (which Jude quotes in vv. 14-15), Jubilees, and 2 Baruch. [These are books which, although not regarded by most Christians as divinely inspired and inerrant, may nevertheless contain some historical truth. Jude's use of such sources does not imply that he agrees with everything in them, only that the specific events he refers to are factual.] In this case, he is writing of the time when, according to Genesis 6:1-4, "the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose." According to Jude and

the sources he draws upon, these "sons of God" (see Job 1:6: 2:1: 38:7 [ESV]) were fallen angels who deserted their own dwelling place, i.e., heaven, and who took up residence among humanity, taking wives from among the daughters of men and producing offspring, the "Nephilim". The Greek phrase rendered by the NIV as "did not keep their positions of authority," refers to their failure to keep to their appointed realm and proper station. The result of their rebellion against the boundaries God had established was that they were condemned to eternal punishment in hell (see 2 Pet. 2:4). They are now imprisoned in a place of "blackest darkness" (v. 13; see 1 Pet. 3:19-20; 2 Pet. 2:17), awaiting the "great Day" of God's final judgment (Rev. 6:17).

v. 7 "... Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion."

The introductory phrase, "in a similar way" indicates that the essence of the rebellion at issue, both here and in the previous example of fallen angels, concerned sexual sin. Sodom and Gomorrah are elsewhere used as examples of wickedness and depravity (Gen. 13:13; 18:20; Isa. 3:9; Jer. 23:14; Ezek. 16:46-48). The specific sin for which they were judged was homosexual conduct (Gen. 19:5; see Lev. 18:22; 20:13).

"They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire."

Just as the fallen angels are destined for eternal fire (Mt. 25:41; Rev. 14:10-11; 20:10), so also the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by fire (Gen. 19:24; Lk. 17:29). That fire was "eternal" in that its effects were permanent; the towns were utterly destroyed and never rebuilt (see Dt. 29:23; Jer. 49:18). Thus, it serves as a metaphor for the fate of those who reject Christ, they will be completely and eternally lost, with no hope of mercy or recovery.

v. 8 "In the very same way, these dreamers pollute their own bodies, reject authority and slander celestial beings." Jude now makes the link with the false teachers (v. 4) explicit: they are guilty of rejecting God's authority "in the very same way" as the fallen angels and the people of Sodom and Gomorrah; i.e., by transgressing the sexual boundaries God has established and thereby defiling themselves physically.

Referring to them as "dreamers" likely indicates that they claimed to have received direct revelation from God endorsing their lewd practices. The "celestial beings" that they are guilty of slandering are probably angels (see 2 Pet. 2:10-11). The nature of the slander is not made clear; perhaps they denigrated angels as bearers of an outdated law, one which was no longer in force to constrain their conduct (Acts 7:53; Heb. 2:2; Gal. 3:19; however; see 1 Cor. 9:21).

# Unit 2 – Woe to False Teachers Jude 1:9-16

## **Text**

<sup>9</sup>But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" <sup>10</sup>Yet these men speak abusively against whatever they do not understand; and what things they do understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals—these are the very things that destroy them.

<sup>11</sup>Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion.

<sup>12</sup>These men are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm—shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted—twice dead. <sup>13</sup>They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.

<sup>14</sup>Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones <sup>15</sup>to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him." <sup>16</sup>These men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.

## Open

What birthday or Christmas present did	Has there been a time when you were the
you look forward to that turned out to be a	subject of slander, or false rumors?
big disappointment?	

## **Discover**

1. In this passage, Jude attacks the false teachers both for what they **are**, and for what they are **doing**. In the space below, paraphrase in your own words what he is saying about what they **are**.

"hidden reefs at your love feasts" (v. 12, ESV)

"shepherds who feed only themselves" (v. 12)

"clouds without rain, blown along by the wind" (v. 12)

"autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted—twice dead" (v. 12)

"wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame" (v. 13)

"wandering stars" (v. 13)

2.	How does Jude describe their conduct; i.e., what misdeeds are they guilty of?
3.	What will be the result of their character and conduct? (vv. 13-15; see Matthew 16:27; 1 Thess. 1:6-10)
<u>(</u>	What will be the result of their character and conduct: (W. 10-10, see Matthew 10.27, 1 Thess. 1.0-10)
4.	Jude references Cain, Balaam, and Korah as their spiritual forefathers (v. 11). In the space below, summarize what the Old Testament tells us about these people.
	Cain – Genesis chapter 4; 1 John 3:11-12
	Balaam – Numbers chapters 22-24; Deuteronomy 23:3-5; Numbers 25:1-3; 31:1-16
	Transord draptord 22 21, Boatordrong 20.0 0, Iransord 20.1 0, 01.1 10
	Korah - Numbers 16:1-40
5.	Given all of this, how could it be that these men were not only fully accepted in the church, but regarded as teachers?
	What lessons does that hold for us?
_	
<u>A</u>	pply
П	When you hear or read comothing now
	When you hear or read something new concerning Christianity, do you (a) accept it, because you trust the person you received it from, (b) reject it, because if it was true, you would have heard it before, (c) validate it (how?)

v. 9 "But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!'" The initial reaction to this verse by a student of the Bible is likely to be bewilderment. What Old Testament passage can Jude possibly be referring to? Such confusion is understandable, as Jude is not alluding to any portion of the canonical Scriptures, but to a book called "The Testament of Moses", a literary work from early in the first century. Unfortunately, no copies of this work exist today; its contents are known to us only by references to them in other texts. However, the traditional Jewish belief regarding an angelic dispute over the body of Moses is also reflected in the writings of Philo of Alexandria, a first-century Jewish philosopher, and in other ancient writings, such as the Targums, which were loose translations of the Old Testament into Aramaic that incorporated commentary and interpretation.

It may cause us some discomfort to find a New Testament author drawing upon sources other than the Scriptures for his arguments. However, just as Jesus did many more things than are recorded in the New Testament (John 21:25); so also many more things took place in the days of the patriarchs than are recounted in the Old Testament. Some of those "other things" are found in extra-Biblical writings, such as those referred to by Jude. But two points must be emphasized. First, that only the Scriptures are inspired by God, and because of this are without error, absolutely reliable and trustworthy (Ps. 33:4; 119:160; Jn. 7:18; 19:35; Rom. 3:4; 2 Tim. 3:15-16; 2 Pet. 1:19-21). Jude's reference to this event tells us that it was indeed historically true, but that does not guarantee that the remainder of "The Testament of Moses" is equally factual.

Second, in the gospel as revealed in the Scriptures we have everything we need for "life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3). Other writings, because they contain mixtures of truth and error, are of limited usefulness and are unnecessary to our spiritual growth and health. Thus, there is no need for us to search through every apocryphal "gospel" or ancient spiritual writing, hoping to find kernels of truth which we can profitably make use of.

The nature of the dispute between Michael and Satan is not clear, although it seems to concern the disposition of Moses' body after his death (see Deut. 34:1-12). Jude's point is that even Michael, an angel of surpassing power and authority (Dan. 10:13; 12:1; Rev. 12:7-9), was unwilling to do what these false teachers recklessly presume to do, which is to issue condemning judgments against heavenly powers (the

Greek word *krisis* is best rendered "verdict", rather than "accusation"). The right to judge belongs to God alone. Thus, Michael did not render a verdict of "slander" against Satan, even though Satan was indeed speaking slanderously against Moses. Instead, Michael appealed to God to judge Satan. In contrast, by arrogating to themselves the right to judge angels, the false teachers greatly overstep their bounds, and their words of judgment bring condemnation only upon themselves.

- v. 10 "Yet these men speak abusively against whatever they do not understand; and what things they do understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals—these are the very things that destroy them." Despite their claims of special revelation (v. 8) and higher knowledge, the false teachers are actually ignorant of the spiritual realities they claim to understand. The only things they do "understand" are their base instinctual desires (this is likely a reference to their uncontrolled sexual appetites). Following that kind of "knowledge" brings moral corruption, and will ultimately result in their destruction in hell (Mt. 5:29-30; 10:28; 1 Cor. 3:17; 2 Pet. 2:12).
- "Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion." Jude here accuses the false teachers of following in the moral and spiritual footsteps of three notorious evildoers from the past, and implies that they will experience the same ruinous judgment, or "woe", as those: Cain, whose murder of his brother became a symbol of envy and hatred (1 Jn. 3:11-12) and who was regarded as one who also led others into sin; Balaam, an oracle-for-hire who accepted money to curse Israel, and who counseled the Moabites to entice Israel into sexual sin in order to turn them away from God (Deut. 23:4; Neh. 13:2; Num. 25:1-3; 31:16); and Korah, who challenged the authority of Moses and was destroyed, along with his family and followers (Num. 16:1-40).
- v. 12 "These men are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm-shepherds who feed only themselves." The "love feasts" in which the false teachers participated were the fellowship meals that accompanied the Lord's Supper in the early church, indicating that they were fully accepted members of the community (see 1 Cor. 11:20-22). Rather than "blemishes", as in the NIV (Gr. spilos), Jude actually describes them as "reefs" or "rocks" (Gr. spilas) against which the rest of the congregation is in danger of being shipwrecked (see 1 Tim. 1:19). Although they are teachers ("shepherds") they care only for themselves, and not the flock, the people of God (see Ezek. 34:2-3; 1 Pet. 5:2).

"They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind: autumn trees. without fruit and uprooted—twice dead." Jude uses agricultural metaphors to drive home the utter emptiness of the false teachers' lives and teachings. They promise much; however, like clouds which appear to be full but bring no rain, their words sound appealing but fail to give life. This may be an allusion to Prov. 25:14: "Like clouds and wind without rain is a man who boasts of gifts he does not give." In addition, the statement that they are "blown along by the wind" may be a reference to the shifting winds of false doctrine which drive them (Eph. 4:14).

Similarly, these men are barren of "fruit" (i.e., God-honoring conduct) in "autumn" (a time when fruit-bearing would be expected), revealing the lack of true spiritual life within (Mt. 7:15-20). As Jesus warned, they will be "cut down and thrown into the fire" (Mt. 7:19; see Lk. 13:6-9). Thus, when Jude speaks of a second death, he is prophetically anticipating their final judgment, when they will be "uprooted" and destroyed.

v. 13 "They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame..." Several commentators have noted that Jude's denunciatory metaphors span the entire realm of nature: earth (trees), sky (clouds), sea, and heavens (stars), underscoring the fact that the influence of these false teachers is completely and comprehensively evil. The accusation that they are "wild waves" echoes Isa. 57:20-21:

But the wicked are like the tossing sea which cannot rest whose waves cast up mire and mud. There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked".

The result of their restless activity is only "shame" (although they themselves doubtless regarded their works with pride; see 1 Cor. 5:1-2; Phil. 3:19). Note that restlessness is viewed as characteristic of wickedness elsewhere in the Bible (Gen.4:12; Mt. 12:43; Jas. 3:8); note also that the sea consistently represents a wild, chaotic, and dangerous force that only God can tame (Job 38:8-11; Ps. 104:6-9; Prov. 8:29; Jer. 5:22; Mt. 8:23-27).

"wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever." According to traditional belief, stars were guided in their courses by angels. In the ancient world, planets were thought to be stars with irregular ("wandering") orbits. Although by Jude's time this was better understood, the metaphor of a "wandering star" persisted as a term for fallen angels, those who failed to continue in the course

laid out for them by God (Isa. 14:12-15; Rev. 9:1; see commentary on Jude 6).

These false teachers are of the same spiritual mold as the fallen angels, and their eventual fate will also be the same: not to shine like stars, nor to dwell in God's light (Dan. 12:3; Rev. 21:23; 22:5), but rather to be condemned to the place of "blackest darkness," the place of isolation and fiery torment that has been prepared for Satan and his angels, eternally cut off from the goodness of God (see Job 18:18; 20:26; Mt. 22:13; 25:30, 41; Jude 1:6).

# vv. 14-15 "Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: 'See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones..."

The fact that this Enoch (not the son of Cain) was the seventh generation from creation, counting Adam as the first (Gen. 5:3-24), is mentioned to underscore his importance; seven was considered the number of perfection. The work Jude quotes from is not a part of the Hebrew Scriptures, but 1 Enoch, which dates from the third century B.C.

Jude's use of this text, 1 Enoch 1:9, is somewhat free; for example, he replaces "he" (i.e., God) in the original with "the Lord", making clear that it is Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, who will return in judgment (Mt. 16:27; 25:31; Mk. 8:38; Jn. 5:25-30; 1 Thess. 3:13; 2 Thess. 1:7).

The language of this verse echoes Deut. 33:2, which describes the coming of the Lord to Sinai, when God gave Moses the ten commandments (Ex. 19:18; Ps. 68:8). Although that event is in the past, it is viewed here as a *type*, i.e. a person or event in the Old Testament which foreshadows something yet to come, its *antitype*. In this case, the antitype is the return of Christ, the *parousia*.

v. 16 "These men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage." The litany of accusations against these wicked men is damning in its scope and gravity. The specific target of their grumblings may have been the moral demands of God, which they rejected as outdated and unrealistic.

While we tend to regard grumbling as a minor infraction, God takes it very seriously; He receives it as being directed toward him, since he is ultimately sovereign over our circumstances (Num. 14:27-35; 16:41-50; 1 Cor. 10:10; Eph. 1:11). Such attitudes are infectious, and betray a lack of faith in God's love, wisdom, and goodness (Deut. 1:27). Ultimately, they result in an unwillingness to trust and obey him (Ps. 106:25).

# Unit 3 – Faith and Mercy Jude 1:17-25

## **Text**

<sup>22</sup>Be merciful to those who doubt; <sup>23</sup>snatch <sup>17</sup>But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. 18 They others from the fire and save them: to others show mercy, mixed with fear-hating even the said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly clothing stained by corrupted flesh. desires." 19 These are the men who divide you, <sup>24</sup>To him who is able to keep you from falling who follow mere natural instincts and do not have and to present you before his glorious presence the Spirit. without fault and with great joy— 25 to the only <sup>20</sup>But you, dear friends, build yourselves up God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.

21 Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. Open ☐ Have there been any times of doubt in ☐ If you are married, what advice would you give a newlywed couple on how to keep your spiritual journey? their relationship strong? Discover 1. What do you think it means to "keep yourselves in God's love"? (v. 21; see John 15:9-10) How do we How do you reconcile this command with Jude's statement that it is Christ who "keeps" us (v. 1), and who keeps us from falling (v. 24)? Read what these verses say, and then summarize your conclusions. John 6:39 Galatians 5:25 John 10:27-30 Philippians 2:12-13 1 Corinthians 1:8 1 Thessalonians 5:22-24 1 Corinthians 15:10 2 Timothy 4:7 Your conclusions:

3.	What does this passage tell us about the "last time	es"? (v. 18; see Heb. 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:20; 1 Jn. 2:18)
4.	How should we respond to those who are wavering astray into false beliefs or practices? (vv. 22-23; so	g between truth and error, or who have been led ee James 5:19-20; Galatians 6:1)
	M/by mainth we need to do this with "feed" (4, 20)	
5.	Why might we need to do this with "fear"? (v. 23; s	ee 1 Cor. 10:12-13)
6.	Summarize below what these verses say about the	e presence of sin and error in the church:
	1 Corinthians 5:1-2, 11-13	1 Timothy 5:20
	0.71	T. 0.10
	2 Thessalonians 3:14-15	Titus 3:10
	How can these statements be harmonized with wh	nat Jude writes in this passage?
7.	Why does it matter that the events Jude is writing (see vv. 4, 14, 17)	about were foretold by the apostles and the prophets?
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_	<u> </u>	
	What do you find most encouraging in the doxology of verses 24-25?	☐ What message from Jude do you think the church most needs to hear today?

vv. 17-18 "... remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. They said to you, 'In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." Jude now shifts his focus, from the false teachers and their coming judgment, to his readers and their present responsibility. The first thing they need to do is "remember," that is, to reflect on the fact that the doings of these evil men were not unforeseen or unexpected, but were in fact anticipated and foretold. Not only did Enoch (v. 14) and other Old Testament authors (v. 4) prophesy about them, but Christ's apostles did so as well. Therefore, their actions do not threaten God's purposes; on the contrary, they give evidence that his plans are being fulfilled. Similarly, the wicked deeds of those who crucified Christ were foretold by prophecy (Isa. 53:1-12), and far from derailing God's plan to redeem humanity, they unwittingly advanced it (Acts 2:23).

The identification of the false teachers with the "scoffers" of the prophecy indicates that Jude viewed these men, and those to whom he was writing, as living in the "last times" of that prophecy. The whole present age; i.e., the time between the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ and his future return, can be considered the "last days" (Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:2; Jam. 5:3), the "last times" (1 Pet. 1:20), and the "last hour" (1 Jn. 2:18).

The characterization of these men as "scoffers" highlights a key point: such persons often do not practice their ungodly lifestyles with a tolerant, respectful "live and let live" attitude; rather, they mock and ridicule those who take seriously the word of God and who seek to follow Christ, slandering them as foolish, ignorant, and hypocritical. In our own day, this can be clearly seen in the manner in which Christians are portrayed in much of the popular media, and also by those in academia. As much as possible, they seek to de-legitimize a Biblical view of morality, in order to obscure the fact that the life they have chosen places them under the wrath of God (Jn. 3:36; Eph. 2:3).

v. 19 "These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit." The false teaching and immorality that these men engaged in had "divided" the church. This doesn't mean that the church had actually split, since all were continuing to share in the Lord's Supper (v. 12); but a separation into two factions had evidently taken place, between the libertines and those holding to Biblical morality. It is likely that those in the former camp considered themselves to be enlightened and free, in contrast to their brothers and sisters, whom they regarded with pity as narrow-minded traditionalists.

The false teachers who were the cause of this disunity claimed to be guided by the Spirit of God, but were in fact controlled by their own base appetites. They did not have the Spirit dwelling within them (as their immoral conduct demonstrated), and so were not themselves true followers of Christ (Rom. 8:9; see 1 Cor. 2:14; 12:13). Thus, their "wisdom" was the wisdom of this world, not the wisdom of God (Jam. 3:15).

The existence of an "us" versus "them" factionalism in the church is noted in other New Testament letters as well (see Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 1:10-12; 11:18; Jam. 2:1-5; Tit. 3:10). Such division is typically the result of a prideful desire to exalt oneself over others (Jam. 3:14-16), a misguided zeal for absolute doctrinal purity at the expense of fellowship, or an intolerant spirit which allows no room for differing opinions on disputed matters (see Rom 14:1-23). Are divisions, then, always to be avoided? No, when an issue goes to the heart of the gospel, a distinction between believers and unbelievers is not only necessary but inevitable (see Lk. 12:51-53; Acts 19:8-9; Gal. 1:6-9; 1 Jn. 2:18-19). However, when less fundamental matters are at stake, a partisan spirit among believers is evidence that something has gone amiss.

vv. 20-21 "But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love...." In contrast to the beginning and end of the letter, in which God's activity in the life of the believer is highlighted, the emphasis here is on man's responsibility. And so, while they are "kept by Jesus Christ" (v. 1), and God is able to keep them from falling (v. 24), the readers are also exhorted to build themselves up, and to keep themselves in God's love. How can we reconcile these statements?

The fact that these two perspectives occur in the space of only a few verses indicates that Jude did not regard them as contradictory, but complementary. This is consistent with the testimony of Paul, who wrote to the believers at Philippi that they should "continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil. 2:12-13; see 1 Cor. 15:10). In other words, while we must strive to obey, and to love, and to serve God, we also need to recognize that the ability, and even the will, to do so comes from God and not from within ourselves (see Ps. 51:10-12; Acts 20:32; Eph. 3:14-19; Col. 2:6-7). Thus, the Christian life is synergistic, a cooperative effort between God and the believer, made possible by the transforming power of the Spirit of Christ living in and through us (see Gal. 2:20).

The exhortation to "keep yourselves in God's love" echoes the words of Christ, who told his disciples.

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love." (John 15:9-10)

And yet Christ also promised,

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand." (John 10:27-29)

Thus we see in John's gospel these same two aspects of faith: our responsibility to continue following Christ, coupled with the sovereign power of God ensuring that we do not fall away.

"... as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life." In contrast to the false teachers, whose focus was on the immediate satisfaction of desire, the hope of the Christian is future-oriented. It involves denying oneself (some) present pleasures, with the expectation of a far greater future reward (see Phil. 3:7-9; 1 Thess. 4:3; 1 Pet. 2:11).

vv. 22-23 "Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh." Jude now considers how those who have been led astray by the false teachers should be treated. Are they to be shunned, driven out of the church, feared, scorned, or hated? No, they are to be shown mercy, with the goal of rescuing them from their spiritual peril. They are not to be personally attacked, but neither are they to be simply ignored, or their views tolerated. This would be to leave them to their fate, which would be equally unloving. Instead, they are to be graciously engaged with, so as to turn them away from their course of self-destruction. By such measures, those who are uncertain of the truth, i.e., who "doubt", may be led away from falsehood.

What of those who are not merely doubting, but who have already embraced the false teaching, even to the point of engaging in the same lewd practices? They are to be "snatched from the fire"; in other words, decisive action is to be taken to swiftly deliver them from the prospect of imminent judgment. This phrase is likely a reference to Zechariah

3:1-4, in which the prophet sees Joshua standing before God in "filthy clothes", being accused by Satan. But God rebukes Satan, calling Joshua a "stick snatched from the fire". Rather than condemning Joshua, God takes away his soiled clothes and replaces them with "rich garments," saying, "See, I have taken away your sin".

Likewise, the approach we are to take, even in the case of those who have sinned shamefully, is not to judge or condemn them, but to confront them in love, seeking to persuade them of their error and lead them, if possible, into a right relationship with God. As James states.

"My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins." (James 5:19-20)

We are not to do this casually, but "with fear". What fear is Jude referring to? Several suggestions have been made; i.e. fear of judgment, fear of God, and fear of sin. But the most likely possibility is the fear of being drawn into sin ourselves. By engaging with those who are involved in sin, we run the risk of being enticed into sin as well. As Paul writes in Galatians 6:1,

"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted."

Thus, when we approach those who have been lead astray from the truth, we must not do it naïvely, but with full awareness of the risk. We must enter into the process with care and humility, seeking God's protection and help, rather than arrogantly relying on our own strength (see 1 Cor. 10:12-13).

Is there never, then, a time and place for separation? Yes, there is. Although Jude does not address it, there eventually comes a time when all attempts at bringing about repentance must be considered to have failed, and the stubbornly defiant sinner put out of the church. But discernment is needed in determining when that time has come (see Mt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:1-2, 11-13; 2 Thess 3:14-15; 1 Tim. 5:20; Tit 3:10).

### Introduction to 2 Peter

#### Canonicity

The inclusion of 2 Peter in the canon, the commonly accepted list of New Testament books, was a relatively late development. Although it was quoted by a few of the early church fathers, including Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria and Cyprian, it was still considered in the fourth century to be a disputed work. This was due primarily to differences in Greek style and vocabulary between the texts of 2 Peter and 1 Peter, which called into question its apostolic authorship. It began to find widespread acceptance only after it was included in the canon of Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, in A.D. 367, and after this, was listed as part of the canon of the synod of Carthage in A.D. 397. Since that time, various commentators, including Luther and Calvin, have expressed reservations, although most have ultimately accepted it as authentic.

#### **Author**

The author identifies himself as "Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ" (1:1). A fisherman by trade, and a native of Capernaum, Peter was personally invited by Christ to be one of his twelve closest disciples. His given name was Simon Bar-Jonah (i.e. son of Jonah), but he was renamed Simon Peter (i.e. "Simon the Rock") by Jesus.

The Peter of the gospels is prone to what some would consider bold, and others, impulsive and foolhardy conduct; for example, stepping onto the surface of the sea and quickly sinking (Mt. 14:30), or rashly proclaiming that he would never deny his master, only to do so in short order (Mt. 26:35, 69-70). In spite of this characteristic (or perhaps because of it), he was beloved by Christ and was chosen to be one of his inner circle, which included the equally fearless brothers James and John.

After the resurrection, Peter was one of the key leaders of the Jesus movement (see Gal. 1:18; 2:1-10). Tradition holds that he was martyred in Rome, likely between A.D. 64 and 68.

The question to be answered, then, is whether the historical Peter did in fact write the book which we have in our Bibles as 2 Peter. The main arguments in opposition are the following: (1) 2 Peter appears to be directed toward a Gentile audience, while (according to Paul) Peter was an apostle to the "circumcised," i.e. Jews (Gal. 2:7-8); (2) 2 Peter deals with different themes than 1 Peter, focusing on false teaching and the coming day of the Lord, rather than persecution; and (3) 2 Peter uses a Greek which is less polished than that of 1 Peter, and also tends to reference Greek and Roman concepts (such as participation in the divine nature, 1:4), rather than quoting extensively from the Old Testament, as 1 Peter does.

So from the internal evidence, one can make a reasonable case that 2 Peter and 1 Peter are not likely to have been written by the same person. However, that is all it is: a "reasonable" case. It is not definitive. Could two such different books have been written by the same person? It certainly is possible. We have no other examples of Peter's writing to enable us to judge whether his literary style was as varied as these two books would indicate. Moreover, if Peter used an amanuensis, i.e., a secretary, to write this letter at his direction (perhaps even employing a separate secretary for each of the two epistles), then these differences of style become less significant as regards authorship. As for the differing themes of the two letters, it would not be unusual for an author to shape his message to the specific needs of his audience.

#### **Date of Writing**

Since Peter, according to tradition, was martyred by Nero, the book would necessarily date from before Nero's death in A.D. 68. And since Peter makes reference to his impending death (2 Pet. 1:13-14), it seems likely that it was written near the end of his life.

#### **Occasion and Purpose**

Peter writes this letter to believers in Jesus who have recently come under the influence of evil men who deny the coming judgment and return of Christ. Against these false teachers, he affirms that God's promises, both of blessing and judgment, will certainly be fulfilled, although they have been temporarily delayed to allow an opportunity for repentance.

# Unit 1 – Grow in Godliness 2 Peter 1:1-11

### **Text**

<sup>1</sup>Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus <sup>5</sup>For this very reason, make every effort to Christ, add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; <sup>6</sup>and to knowledge, self-control; and to To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; <sup>7</sup>and to godliness, brotherly kindness; received a faith as precious as ours: and to brotherly kindness, love. 8For if you <sup>2</sup>Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and Lord. <sup>3</sup>His divine power has given us everything unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus we need for life and godliness through our Christ. 9But if anyone does not have them, he is knowledge of him who called us by his own glory nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he and goodness. <sup>4</sup>Through these he has given us has been cleansed from his past sins. his very great and precious promises, so that <sup>10</sup>Therefore, my brothers, be all the more through them you may participate in the divine eager to make your calling and election sure. For nature and escape the corruption in the world if you do these things, you will never fall, 11 and caused by evil desires. you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Open ☐ What do you understand better today than ☐ What historical figure, or person from the you did ten years ago? What do you past, do you identify with? Why? appreciate more today than ten years ago? Discover 1. What does this passage tell us about the character of God? Peter identifies several character traits that we should "make every effort" to grow in (v. 5). Why should we do this? v. 3 v. 9 v. 10 v. 4 v. 8 v. 11

3.	What do you think it means to "make your calling and election sure"? (v. 10)
	What is our part in this process? (vv. 5, 10) What is God's part? (vv. 1, 3, 4)
	What is our part in this process: (vv. 5, 10) what is God's part: (vv. 1, 5, 4)
4.	How do we "participate in the divine nature"? (v. 4)
5.	Choose one of the chacter traits in vv. 5-7. In the space below, describe it. What does it look like? How does it differ from its opposite?
6.	Are you growing in any of the ways Peter describes? If so, how?
7.	How do the virtues identified in vv. 5-7 relate to one another? Is it possible to have some of them without having all of them?
	without having all of them?
_	
A	pply
	Which of the virtues in vv. 5-7 do you think are
	Which of the virtues in vv. 5-7 do you think are the most important? Why?  If you could choose one of these to grow in, what would it be? How can you start to make that a reality this week?

v. 1 "Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ. To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours . . . " This verse follows the standard form of an ancient letter, opening with the identify of the author and the intended recipients, followed by a wish for their welfare (v. 2). The author is Simon Peter, one of the Twelve who were chosen by Christ to accompany him during his earthly ministry (Mt. 4:18; 10:1-2; Mk. 3:14; Lk. 6:13-16; Jn. 1:41-42; 6:70; 15:19), and whom he sent into the world to preach the gospel (Mt. 10:1-42; Jn. 17:18; 20:21; Acts 1:8). Both titles, "servant" and "apostle", speak to Peter's (derived) authority. As an apostle, he had been commissioned by Christ himself, and the message he carried was not his own, but that of Christ. As a servant (or, "slave"), he shared in the status of his Master (see Jn. 15:20-21); thus, "servant" was a term, not only of humility, but also of honor.

The recipients are not named; however, we can infer that Peter does have a specific church, or group of churches, in mind, since in the body of the letter he addresses their specific circumstances and indicates that he had written to them previously (2 Pet. 3:1). They possess a faith as "precious" (or "honorable") as "ours" – likely a reference to the faith which Peter and the other apostles share. Each generation of believers receives as their heritage a faith whose power and sufficiency is equal to that which Christ passed on to the apostles, undiminished by separation of time, distance, or culture.

The phrase "our God and Savior Jesus Christ" could be read as "our God, and [our] Savior Jesus Christ," emphasizing the distinction of Persons within the Trinity; i.e., God the Father and God the Son. However, the sentence structure, and the parallel with 1:11 / 3:18, "our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," in which both terms clearly refer to the Son, indicate that Peter is here referring to Jesus, not only as "Savior" but also as "God" (see Jn. 1:1; 1:18; 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Heb. 1:8; Tit. 2:13; 1 Jn. 5:20).

"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness . . . " In vv. 3-11, we have a mini-sermon, consisting of a review of God's saving acts in history (vv. 3-4), a call to personal response in the present (vv. 5-10), and a promise of future (eternal) blessing (v. 11). The phrase "life and godliness" is likely a hendiadys, a figure of speech in which two nouns joined by "and" perform the function of an adjective and a noun. In this case, the equivalent phrase would be "a godly life" or "godly living". In other words, God has provided us with all the resources we need to live in a way that is pleasing to him, and therefore we have no excuse for failing to do so.

"... through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness." The means by which we receive the power to live a God-honoring life is the knowledge of Christ. This "knowledge" is not merely intellectual, i.e., the accumulation of facts about his person and works; rather, it is a deep understanding that can only come through a personal relationship, the kind of relationship that Peter himself tragically denied (Lk. 22:31-34; 54-62; see Jn. 8:20; 8:55; 10:14-15; 14:7-17; 17:3; Gal. 4:8-9; Eph. 1:17; Phil. 3:10). The knowledge of Christ produces not only insight, but also transformation (1 Jn. 2:3-5; 4:8).

Note that this knowledge did not come by our own initiative, but was the result of Christ's call into our lives (see 1 Cor. 1:9; Eph. 1:18; 2 Thess. 2:14; 1 Pet. 1:15; 2:9; 5:10). Note also that the basis of this knowledge was not our own excellence or worth, but the glory and goodness of Christ.

"Through these he has given us his very v. 4 great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires." Peter does not specify which promises he has in mind; his focus is on their results. The first benefit, that we "participate in the divine nature," may trouble contemporary ears, perhaps hearing in these words echoes of New Age spirituality or Eastern mysticism. But Peter is borrowing an idea from the intellectual and cultural environment of his day and using it for his own purposes. In the writings of Greek philosophers, this phrase could refer to the existence of a divine spark within mankind, or to a sharing in some characteristic of God. The latter is the meaning here; not that we become God, or that our human nature is melded with God's divine nature, eliminating the distinction between Creator and creation and extinguishing our individual identity, but rather that we become like him by sharing in his communicable attributes, such as holiness, wisdom, and love. This transformation is both a future hope (1 Cor. 15:35-53; Phil. 3:21; 1 Jn. 3:2) and a present reality (2 Cor. 3:18; 5:17).

As a result of becoming like God in our character, we will be protected from the corrupting influence of this fallen world, which is driven by unrestrained desire, or lust (Rom. 12:2).

v. 5 "For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge" The "reason" for this exhortation is the content of vv. 2-3; i.e., because of what God has done for us in providing all that we need for a godly life, and because his promises allow us to share in his holiness and thereby keep us from being corrupted by the world's moral decay, we should seek to grow in every kind of virtue.

vv. 5-7 The cataloging and linking together of virtues is found elsewhere in the New Testament, and there is a good deal of commonality among the contents of these lists (see Rom. 5:3-5; Gal. 5:22-23; Jam. 1:3-4; 3:17). From this we can draw at least two conclusions. First, that there is a core Christian character which is independent of personality, or heritage, or culture, although the ways in which these traits are demonstrated will vary according to one's life situation. "Perseverance," for example, will mean different things for different people at different times and places. And yet the actions of any mature Christian will manifest the ability and willingness to persist in a right course of action despite difficulties and setbacks. Note that these traits are characteristic of *Christians* because they are attributes of God. And so as we grow in Christlikeness, our lives will more and more display these traits.

Another conclusion we may draw from these lists of virtues is that the traits they identify are not independent of one another, but are parts of a unified whole. Since God is one undivided personality, those characteristics of his which we share will also be integrally related. This principle of the "unity of virtues" was recognized by Aristotle and other Greek philosophers, although they did not understand that the unifying principle was the character of God.

Against this idea, one might object that it is easy to find examples of persons who exhibit some, but not all, of the virtues; for example, a person who is very determined in the pursuit of a goal, but who lacks "knowledge," i.e., wisdom and understanding. The answer to this is twofold; first, that none of these virtues stands on its own by definition. Therefore, tenacity without knowledge is not a true godly perseverance, but mere stubbornness, or foolish persistence, or proud pig-headedness. Paul did not praise the Jews who zealously opposed the gospel, noting that their zeal was "not based on knowledge," and was thus implicitly not virtuous (Rom. 10:2; see Prov. 19:2). Likewise, Jesus did not praise the Pharisees for their persistence in seeking converts, but criticized them for it (Mt. 23:15).

The second response to this objection is simply that people are imperfect, and thus the fact that we display the virtues inconsistently does not argue against their essential unity. It is also true that we are too quick to take apparent virtue at face value, and thus may see inconsistencies when in fact the person is consistently motivated by self-interest, their apparent virtue being only a persuasive sham.

v. 8 "For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." Growth in Christian character is not only possible, but expected (see Heb. 5:12). However, such positive change is not automatic or inevitable: it requires intentional, sustained effort over time (v. 5). This process of progress and productivity is what makes our "calling and election sure" (v. 10).

Note that remaining in an "ineffective and unproductive" state is not viewed as a valid option for a Christian. It is not merely undesirable; it is something wholly out of character for a believer. Elsewhere in the New Testament, such uselessness is portrayed as evidencing a lack of genuine life (Mt. 13:22; Jn. 15:8; Rom. 7:4; Jam. 2:14-20; Eph. 5:10-11; Jude 1:12). Indeed, those whose lives produce no fruit will be "cut down and thrown into the fire" (Mt. 3:10; 7:19; see Lk. 13:6-9; Jn. 15:2).

- v. 9 "But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins." To continue in one's pre-conversion lifestyle, unconcerned with becoming more like Christ, betrays a serious problem of perception. Such a person is short-sighted, unable to see clearly either the past or the future (v. 11). They have "forgotten" the cleansing from sin which occurred when they came to faith, in that they show no awareness of how that event ought to affect their life (see Rom. 6:1-14; 1 Cor. 6:9-11, 18-20).
- vv. 10-11 "Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall" By doing these things, we will make our identity as believers certain. But is this a subjective result, or an objective one? In other words, does such conduct and growth confirm to the believer that he or she is truly saved, or does it actually result in changing their status from "tentative" or "conditional" to "certain"?

The answer is that the kind of growth and fruitfulness which God expects is a confirmation of the change he has already accomplished in us at our conversion (see Lk. 6:43-45; 1 Jn. 2:5-6). It is the natural and necessary result of that transformation, and of his choosing and calling us to himself. In addition, through our growth in Christian virtue, we will be kept from falling away from Christ (see Heb. 4:11), and will be assured of being welcomed into Christ's kingdom at his return (see Mt. 7:21).

# Unit 2 – Recalling the Past, Looking to the Future 2 Peter 1:12-21

### **Text**

12 So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. 13 I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, 14 because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. 15 And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.
16 We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." 4 18 We

☐ If you could have one "superpower", what

ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

<sup>19</sup>And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. <sup>20</sup>Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. <sup>21</sup>For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

☐ What would you like your children, friends,

<sup>a</sup> 17 Matt. 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35

# Open

	would it be?	neighbors, or co-workers to remember about you after your death?
D	iscover	
1.	Why do you think Peter would choose to remind his reade since they are "firmly established in the truth"? (v. 12)	ers of things they already know, especially
_	How might we apply this principle to ourselves?	
2.	What basic point is Peter seeking to establish in verses 1	6 and 18?
	Why does this matter?	

3.	What is it that makes the word of the (Old Testament) prophets "more certain"? How does it do so?
4.	In the space below, paraphrase verses 20-21 in your own words.
4.	The space below, paraphrase verses 20-21 in your own words.
	What would be different if this were not true?
5.	How is prophecy like "a light shining in a dark place? (v. 19) Have you found this to be the case in your own life?
6.	Review the gospel accounts of the Transfiguration (Mt. 17:1-9; Mk. 9:2-10; Lk. 9:28-36). What does this event reveal about Jesus Christ? (vv. 17-18)
7	Why do you think Jesus allowed Peter, James and John to witness this?
7.	with do you think Jesus allowed Feter, James and John to witness this?
Α	pply
	If you could witness personally one of the events recorded in the gospels (for example, the Transfiguration), which would it be?  What "cleverly invented stories" (v. 16) do people believe today? Why?

v. 12 "So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have." As any seasoned pastor knows, the greatest need most people have, most of the time, is not to learn new truths, but rather to be reminded of the truths they already know, and to be encouraged and exhorted to live in light of them (see Rom. 15:14-16). Not only do our beliefs affect our behavior; our behavior also influences our beliefs. We naturally seek consistency between our creed and our conduct; if these are out of synch, we experience an uncomfortable "cognitive dissonance" between what we do and what we say. And so, if the way we live is contrary to our profession of faith, we are at risk of drifting away from the truth (Heb. 2:1). As the evangelist D.L. Moody put it, "The Bible will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from the Bible."

God knows this, and so instituted ceremonies under both the old and new covenants for his people to renew their memory of his saving acts and promises. In the present era, the Lord's Supper serves as such a reminder (Lk. 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24-25). Another way in which we can keep the knowledge of the truth fresh in our minds, and thus working in us to influence our character, is through hearing, reading, and studying the Scriptures on a regular basis (see Rom. 12:1-2; 1 Tim. 4:12-13).

vv. 13-14 "I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body..." The imagery of the body as a "tent", or a temporary dwelling, was common in Greek literature of the time, and is also found in the writings of Paul (2 Cor. 5:1, 4). Note, however, that this body is not "put aside" so that we might become disembodied spirits (as the Gnostics taught), but rather so that we may exchange it for an eternal body which is far superior. As Paul writes,

"Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling" (2 Cor. 5:1-2)

"So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body." (1 Cor. 15:42-44a)

"... because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me." The revelation Peter refers to could be that of John 13:36 or 21:18-19. In both of these, Peter was told

that he would die, although neither gives a specific time reference. However, Peter's age at the time of the writing of this epistle, combined with the knowledge that he would not be living at the return of Christ, could justify the conclusion that he would die "soon".

Or, since Peter describes this as a personal word from Christ to him (i.e., "to me"), it may have been delivered privately during the earthly ministry of Christ, or spoken publicly and simply not recorded in the gospels (see Jn. 21:25). It could also have been a revelation from Christ after the resurrection, in the form of a dream, a vision, or a prophecy. We know that Peter received at least one vision (Acts 10:9-23; see Acts 12:9), as did Paul (Acts 16:9-10; 18:9; 26:19; 2 Cor. 12:1).

v. 15 "And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things." Peter mentions his imminent death in order to lend greater weight to the things he is telling them; the last words of a dying man were considered to have special significance. Since he will soon pass from the scene, this letter is the means by which he will "always remind" them of "these things," both now and in the future (v. 1). Thus the letter will serve as a testament, or witness, of Peter's teaching after his death.

v. 16 "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty."

The implied accusation here is that the accounts of Christ's miracles and resurrection, and the promise of his return, are mere fables, myths, and legends, like the stories of Greek gods and goddesses, believed in as factual only by the simple and naïve, and constructed by religious leaders for the purpose of keeping their followers under control. Thus, "scoffers" mock the bearers of the gospel, saying, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." (2 Pet. 3:4). We should not be surprised when, two millennia later, the very same things are stated or insinuated in popular books and news magazines (usually at Easter). There is truly nothing new under the sun (Eccl. 1:9).

Peter's response to this is that, on the contrary, he and the other apostles witnessed these things, and preach them not as rumor or hearsay, but as personal experience (v. 18). The event which displayed the "majesty" of Christ was the Transfiguration (Mt. 17:1-9; Mk. 9:2-10; Lk. 28-36). Not only did it reveal Christ as the Son of God, but it foreshadowed the power and glory of Christ which will be revealed at his return, his "coming" (Mt. 24:30; Mk. 13:26; Lk. 21:27; see 2 Thess. 2:8).

v. 17 "For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'" These words echo Psalm 2:7, in which the "One enthroned in heaven" declares,

"You are my Son; today I have become your Father."

Thus, the words heard at the Transfiguration were a fulfillment of a prophecy of the Messiah, in which the Lord invests his "Anointed One" with authority to rule the nations. Note that the title "Son" in Ps. 2:7 does not refer to the relationship between the members of the Trinity. Rather, it is a coronation title which speaks of Jesus' exaltation and ascension to the throne of David, and of his role as king, under God the Father, over all creation (see Heb. 1:5; 5:5). Thus, this "honor and glory" is not innate, but received; it is bestowed upon God the Son by God the Father (see Jn. 8:54).

This phrase, "honor and glory" is used to describe the exaltation of Christ when he ascends to heaven after the resurrection (Jn. 17:2, 5; Acts 3:13; Heb. 2:7, 9; 5:7-9; 1 Pet. 1:21; Rev. 5:12-13). Thus, the "honor and glory" which Christ received at the Transfiguration was *proleptic*; it looked ahead to his glorification at the resurrection. This is confirmed by the substance of Jesus' conversation with Moses and Elijah: Luke 9:31 tells us that they "spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem." This is the glory which will be revealed when he returns as victorious judge (Mt. 16:27; 24:30; 25:31).

v. 18 "We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain." Peter's testimony is not hearsay, but a first-person account of what he and the other apostles both saw and heard (see Acts 4:20; 22:15) at the Transfiguration (Mt. 17:1-13; Mk. 9:2-13; Lk. 9:28-36).

The reference to the "sacred mountain" is an explicit link to Psalm 2:6, in which the Lord declares,

"I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill",

This emphasizes that the Transfiguration was a fulfillment of the prophecy of Psalm 2, and that Christ therefore has the authority to judge those who reject him (see 2 Pet. chapters 2-3).

v. 19 "And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place..." Although "scoffers" foolishly dismiss the ancient warnings of judgment and destruction as morbid fantasies (see 2 Pet. 3:3-4), the evidence of

the Transfiguration affirms them as true. It has "made more certain," i.e. confirmed, the Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ, especially those which speak of his honor, glory and authority. Therefore, we will "do well" to receive and study them, because they bring "light" (knowledge and revelation) in the midst of a "dark place", i.e. a blind and sinful world (see 2 Sam. 22:29; Ps. 18:28; 119:105; Isa. 42:16; 61:1; Jn. 8:12; 12:46; 2 Cor. 4:6; Co. 1:13; 1 Pet. 2:9).

- "... until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." In ancient times, Venus was identified as the "morning star" because it appeared at dawn. Christ is called the "bright Morning Star" (Rev. 22:16) because his appearance heralds the arrival of a new age, in contrast to the present time of darkness (see Mt. 4:16; Lk. 1:79; Jn. 1:5; 3:19; 8:12; 12:46; Acts 26:18). When he returns, there will be no more need to rely on the Scriptures for illumination, for we will then be in the presence of our Savior, and will "know fully," even as we are now "fully known" (1 Cor. 13:12; see 2 Cor. 4:6).
- v. 20 "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation." In Greek, the literal sense of these words is that no prophecy "is of its own interpretation." The phrase "its own" could be understood in two ways, either as referring to the one transmitting the prophecy, i.e. the prophet (as in the NIV); or as referring to the one receiving it, i.e. the hearer or reader (as in the NASB, "no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation"). In the context, it is likely the first meaning which is in view, since it is the reliability of the prophecies themselves, rather than our understanding of them, which undergirds the exhortation that we should "pay attention" (v. 19). In other words, we should give heed to the Old Testament scriptures which spoke of Christ and of the age to come, because they are the word of God, and not merely the words of men.
- v. 21 "For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." This is consistent with the Old Testament view of prophecy, in which the prophet must speak only what he receives from God, and not his own thoughts (Jer. 23:16; Ezek. 13:3; Deut. 18:20).

The statement that the prophet is "carried along" does not specify exactly how the divine will interacts with human personality. The main point is that God is the one who initiates and controls the process, such that the result is genuinely His word, and not merely the words of men.

# Unit 3 – Beware of False Prophets 2 Peter 2:1-10a

### **Text**

<sup>1</sup>But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. <sup>2</sup>Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. <sup>3</sup>In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

<sup>4</sup>For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, a putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; if he condemned the cities of Sodom and

Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; <sup>7</sup> and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men <sup>8</sup> (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)— <sup>9</sup> if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment. <sup>c</sup> <sup>10</sup> This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature <sup>d</sup> and despise authority.

<sup>a</sup>4 Greek Tartarus <sup>b</sup>4 Some manuscripts into chains of darkness <sup>c</sup>9 Or unrighteous for punishment until the day of judgment <sup>d</sup>10 Or the flesh

## Open

	-	
	Have you ever served as a juror in a trial? What was your impression of the process?	☐ If you could change one thing about our judicial system, what would it be?
D	iscover	
1.	How does the author describe the character and c	conduct of the false teachers? (vv. 1-3, 10)
2.	What will be the consequences?	
	For them (vv. 1, 3, 9-10)	For others (v. 2)
3.	How can false teachers be identified?	
	Romans 16:17-18	Galatians 1:6-9
	2 Corinthians 11:3-4	1 Timothy 6:3-5

4.	How do false teachers "deny" Christ and "despise"	nis authority? (vv. 1, 10; see Mt. 7:21-2	3; 15:8)
5.	Why do you think false teachers are often successf	ul in deceiving many people?	
6.	Are there false teachers in the church in our day? If	so, who would you identify as such, an	d why?
			,
7.	In verses 4-9, what sins does Peter identify, and what sins does Peter identify, and what sins does Peter identify.	at was the result?	
	Sin	Result	
	v. 4		
	v. 5		
	_		
	v. 6		
8.	Who was spared the consequences of those aroun	d them whom God judged? Why?	
	v. 5		
	vv. 7-8		
	vv. <i>1</i> -0		
9.	What is the author's point in vv. 4-8 (see v. 9)? Res	tate it in your own words	
9.	What is the author's point in vv. 4-6 (see v. 9)? Nes	tate it iii your own words.	
A	pply		
	What do you find most encouraging about this	☐ How would you define what it me	ans to be
_	passage? Most disturbing?	"godly"? Would you say that mos meet this definition? Why or why	t Christians

The central passage of 2 Peter, 2:1-3:3, is very similar to the book of Jude, indicating either that one of the authors borrowed from the other, or that both were drawing on a third common source. Compare, for example, the following parallel passages:

Jude	2 Peter
4	2:1-3
5-7	2:4-9
8-10	2:10-12
11	2:13-16
12-13	2:17
14-16	2:18
17-19	3:1-3

Most scholars have concluded that 2 Peter relies on Jude, for two reasons: (1) no third source has ever been identified, and (2) if the reverse were true, one would expect Jude to have used more of 2 Peter than just the second chapter and a small part of the third. However, it would be a mistake to assume that therefore, Peter is making the same points as Jude. Peter does not quote from Jude verbatim; rather, he is an author in his own right, and reworks the material for his own theological and practical purposes.

v. 1 "But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you." The existence of those who falsely claim to speak on God's behalf is not a recent phenomenon; on the contrary, it has been a recurring problem for the people of God throughout history (Isa. 9:14-16; Jer. 5:31; 14:14; 23:25-40; 27:9-17; 28:15-16; 29:8-9; Ezek. 13:2-7; Mt. 7:15; 24:11, 24; Lk. 6:26). Thus, it should come as no surprise to those in the present age that all teachers, and all teaching, must be evaluated against the standard of God's Word (Acts 17:11; Rom. 16:17; 2 Cor. 11:2-4, 12-15; Gal. 1:6-9; 1 Tim. 6:3-5; 1 Jn. 4:1).

> "They will secretly introduce destructive heresies . . . bringing swift destruction on themselves." Unlike many today, Peter does not regard novelty or innovation in theology as desirable (see Acts 17:21). False teachers exceed the boundaries of their role by "introducing" new ideas into the church; that is, by advancing doctrines which are different than those passed down from Christ and the apostles (Gal. 1:6-9). Often they do this, not openly, but surreptitiously; for example, by using the same theological terms, but with different meanings. For if they admitted that they were abandoning the faith, their teaching would be rejected (and they would lose their positions as pastors and seminary professors!).

> The end result of these erroneous teachings is destruction; i.e., leading those who accept them into eternal ruin (2 Pet. 3:7; see Mt. 7:13; Jn. 17:12; Rom. 9:22; Phil. 3:19; Heb. 10:39). Under the Old Testament Law, the punishment for prophesying falsely

was death (Deut. 13:1-5; 18:15-22); the consequences of disseminating heretical teachings concerning Christ and the gospel are even more dire (see vv. 3, 20-21). Their destruction will be "swift", not in the sense of "soon", but in the sense of "sudden" (see Mk. 13:35-37; 1 Thess. 5:2-3).

"even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them . . . " This phrase is frequently used to support a doctrine of universal atonement, i.e., that Christ died for all men equally, including those who never believe, or who explicitly reject him. Since some of those whom Christ "bought" are condemned, the argument goes, it cannot be true that Christ died only for the elect. However, that interpretation would place this verse in conflict with passages which teach that Christ's death was effectual, i.e., that it actually accomplished the salvation of his people, paying the penalty of their sin and appeasing God's wrath toward them, rather than merely making it possible for some to be saved. For example, in Eph. 5:25-27, Paul writes,

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish. but holy and blameless."

See also Mt. 1:21; Jn. 10:15; 11:51-52; 17:6, 9, 19; Heb. 9:28; Tit. 2:14; Rev. 5:9.

What then does this phrase mean? Here are two of the stronger possibilities. First, the term "bought" (Gr. agorazō) need not carry the sense of being redeemed by the blood of Christ. More frequently, it refers to some other kind of acquisition, such as the purchase of a field (Mt. 13:44). In the four passages where it dose have a salvific sense (I Cor. 6:20; 7:23; Rev. 5:9; 14:3-4), those being purchased are clearly believers, unlike here. In addition, the Revelation passages indicate that it was not all men, but a distinct group "from among men" who were purchased / redeemed. Therefore, to say that Christ "bought" the false teachers could mean only that, as "sovereign Lord", he had obtained the right to rule over them. This right was the result of his exaltation by God the Father, as a reward for his obedience in going to the cross (Phil. 2:5-11; Mt. 28:18; Acts 2:32-36; Eph. 1:18-23; Heb. 2:5-9).

A second possibility is that a saving sense of the term "bought" is intended, but that Peter is speaking in terms of the false teachers' view of themselves rather than the reality. In other words, they were denying the Lord, who (according to what they falsely professed to believe) had redeemed them from sin.

- In what sense did they "deny" Christ? Not only in the "destructive heresies" and made-up stories which they taught (vv. 1, 3), but also in their manner of life, which implicitly rejected his lordship over them, i.e., by their "shameful ways" (v. 2) and their "greed" (v. 3), by following "the corrupt desire of the sinful nature" and despising authority (v. 10), and by committing blasphemy (v. 12) and adultery (v. 14).
- v. 2 "Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute." Teachers are not merely information providers, but role models (this is likely one of the reasons for James' warning of a stricter judgment for those who enter into the teaching ministry; Jam. 3:1). They have great power to influence, not only thought, but behavior. And so the risk against which Peter warns is not merely that wrong ideas will find a hearing, but that licentious and immoral conduct will come to be regarded as acceptable by professing Christians, will be practiced by them, and will thus be viewed as characteristic of Christians by unbelievers. Note that Peter refers to Christianity as "the way of truth," emphasizing that it is not merely a set of doctrinal principles, but a way of life that is guided by those truths. One cannot be separated from the other.
- v. 3 "In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up." There truly is nothing new under the sun; the goal of religious hucksters, from Moliere's Tartuffe to Sinclair Lewis' Elmer Gantry, has always been to exploit others—financially, sexually, or otherwise. The stories they devise to fool the faithful may take the form of a fanciful personal narrative substantiating their claim to spiritual and moral authority, or may consist of an alleged dream or vision relating an encounter with God. In most cases, "follow the money" (or the affairs) is a reliable means of sniffing out frauds and charlatans.
  - "Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping." In spite of appearances, those who prey on the credulity of the pious will not in the end "get away with it". Their judgment is certain; in fact, it has already been pronounced, and the judge is not sleeping, but merely biding his time until the appointed time arrives in which the sentence is to be carried out. The demons, at least, understand this (see Mt. 8:29).

The imagery of their condemnation "hanging over them" brings to mind Cicero's tale of the sword which the emperor Dionysius hung by a hair over the head of his servant Damocles, or Jonathan Edwards' sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God".

- v. 4 "For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment" This is a reference to Gen. 6:1-4, an account which is developed more fully in the extra-Biblical book of 1 Enoch. These writings describe the fate of fallen angels who engaged in sexual union with human women, and who were judged as a result. Peter does not see a need to defend the story as true, but simply assumes it. His point concerns the certainty of judgment. If even angelic beings who sinned sexually will not escape condemnation, but are now being held in bondage in anticipation of the coming day of judgment, how much less will these false teachers escape judgment for their own immoral conduct?
- v. 5 "if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others" The point here, and in the account of Sodom and Lot (vv. 6-8) is twofold: first, that God is able to preserve his people, even in the midst of an all-consuming judgment upon the wicked (e.g., a worldwide flood / the complete destruction of a city). And second, that the presence of godly people in a society is no guarantee against God bringing judgment upon it. Thus, even though the false teachers are in the midst of God's people, and even though they participate in the life of the believing community, they will not be spared. They cannot use the righteous as "human shields" against the wrath of God.
- v. 9 "if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials" God will rescue his people from their present trials when he returns to judge the wicked, just as he rescued Noah and Lot from the trials they endured while living in the midst of an ungodly people. He did this by bringing catastrophic destruction upon their respective societies.
  - "and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment." Will those who have died outside of Christ experience torment from the time of their death until the final day of judgment? The parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Lk. 16:19-31) would indicate that they do. However, in this passage the focus is on the judgment to come, and the translation is not as clear as the NIV text implies. Thus, it is likely that Peter is referring to the future judgment of the unrighteous, not their suffering in the intermediate state between death and resurrection.
- v. 10 "This is especially true of those who . . . despise authority." No matter how much we praise and worship God, if we disobey his commands, we are not honoring him, but despising him (see Mt. 7:21-23; 15:8).

# Unit 4 – Freedom and Slavery 2 Peter 2:10b-22

### **Text**

Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings; <sup>11</sup> yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not bring slanderous accusations against such beings in the presence of the Lord. <sup>12</sup> But these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will perish.

13 They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you. 14 With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed—an accursed brood! 15 They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness. 16 But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey—a beast without speech—who spoke with a man's voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

<sup>17</sup>These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. <sup>18</sup>For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. <sup>19</sup>They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. 20 If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. 21 It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. <sup>22</sup>Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," b and, "A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud."

<sup>a</sup>13 Some manuscripts *in their love feasts* <sup>b</sup>22 Prov. 26:11

## Open

	How do you like to spend your free time? Do you have any hobbies?		What is the last book you read (or the book you are reading now)?
D	iscover		
1.	Peter notes that the false teachers delivered their me wrong to speak boldly? Why or why not? (see Acts 4		
2.	How are the false teachers like animals? (v. 12)		
3.	What is the principle of sowing and reaping? (Gal. 6:7 their case? (v. 13)	7-8; s	see Rom. 6:21, 23). How will it be fulfilled in

4.	In the space below, summarize the main	points of the story of Balaam, from Numbers chapters 22-24.	
	How would you describe Balaam's chara	acter? How are the false teachers following his example?	
_	What was the end result for Balaam? (N	um. 31:16-17) What will be the end result for the false teachers?	
5.	What do the false teachers promise? Do	they deliver? Why or why not?	
6.	What point is Peter making in vv. 20-21?	P How does it compare to the teaching of the following passages?	
	Peter's point:	John 8:31	
		Hebrews 6:4-6	
		1 John 2:19	
7	T. In your own words, restate the proverbial saying in verse 22. How does it apply to the false teachers?		
Α	pply		
_			
	What does the word "freedom" mean to Has your understanding of freedom chair		
	as a result of following Christ?	igou to slavely:	

vv. 10-11 "Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings"

The false teachers speak with authority, delivering their pernicious message with fearless and persuasive conviction. They are sure of themselves, supremely confident, unafflicted by self-doubt. And certainly this was a large part of their appeal. Many people will follow someone who proclaims loudly enough that he has the answers, especially if those "answers" are what they sinfully want to hear (v. 18).

Is it wrong, then, to speak boldly? Not at all. Boldness in the service of the gospel is a virtue. Peter and John prayed for, and demonstrated, boldness in speech (Acts 4:29-31); as did Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:46; 14:3; 19:8; 28:31) and Apollos (Acts 18:26). Such boldness is consistent with humility and obedience. But boldness which glorifies self is the opposite, a deadly vice which leads ultimately to destruction (v. 12).

The term for "bold" (Gr. tolmētai, from tolmaō) carries the broad meaning of "dare" or "venture"; here, it connotes presumption in claiming an authority or status which one does not legitimately possess (compare Rom. 15:18; 2 Cor. 10:12). The false teachers who exalt themselves in this way also demonstrate contempt for the authority of God, in that they fail to show the appropriate respect ("fear") for the angels who are his messengers and representatives (vv. 11-12).

The specific nature of their slander is not made clear. Since the false teachers deny the reality of Christ's return and the final judgment (3:3-7), it may concern the part which angels are to play in that judgment (see Mt. 13:39-42, 49-50; 16:27; 25:31-33; 2 Thess. 1:6-7).

"yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not bring slanderous accusations against such beings in the presence of the Lord." The false teachers are so arrogant that they casually slander angels, beings who are far superior to them. This is something that even the angels themselves do not dare to do! The accusations which the (holy) angels refrain from making are likely those which could rightfully be made against Satan and the fallen angles (i.e., demons). Even though they are standing before God Himself (see Job 1:6-7; 2:1; Lk. 1:19), they hold their tongues, since only Christ has the right to judge, which he will do at the proper time (Mt. 8:29).

Other interpretations of these verses have been proposed; e.g., that the "celestial beings" were not angels but rather human authorities; or that the ones whom the holy angels refrain from judging are not other (fallen) angels, but the false teachers themselves. In either case, the author's fundamental point would be unchanged.

- v. 12 "But these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will perish." Rather than being motivated by spiritual concerns, the false teachers are driven by their base instinctual desires; i.e., the urge to satisfy physical needs (for food, sex, or pleasure) or the will to exert dominance. In doing so, they are acting like animals instead of human beings made in God's image. One of the basic purposes for which animals are created is to be hunted and killed (i.e., for food or clothing, see Gen. 9:1-3; Mt. 3:4). The false teachers, who share so much in common with these unreasoning creatures, will share a similar fate. They will not be able to escape the judgment of God, but will be relentlessly pursued and brought to account by Him, suffering eternal destruction as a result (Job 11:20; Jer. 23:23-24; Rom. 12:19; Heb. 4:12-13; 12:25; 1 Thess. 5:2-3).
  - vv. 13-14 "They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you." The false teachers will be fully recompensed for the damage their words and actions have caused, according to the law of sowing and reaping (Gal. 6:7-8; see Rom. 6:21, 23). As the author of Hebrews writes (10:31), "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God", dreadful because of the certainty, as well as the severity, of his judgment. When that day comes, there will be no pardon, no plea-bargaining, no second chances, and no escape for those who are outside of Christ (Jn. 3:36).

The "feast" referred to here is likely the agape meal, the love-feast that accompanied observance of the Lord's Supper. As in the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 11:17-34), they had turned this observance of Christ's sacrifice into an opportunity for gluttony and drunkenness, and in this case, for seduction and sexual debauchery as well. Their sin was not even hidden from view, but engaged in openly, "in broad daylight". Often, those whose consciences are seared lose the capacity for shame. They no longer feel the need to conceal their sin; in fact, they glory in it, brazenly and aggressively flaunting their depravity.

The Greek term which Peter uses for "blots" is *spilos*. This term is also used in Eph. 5:27 to indicate that all "blemishes" will be removed from the church (see Col. 1:22; Mt. 13:24-30; Rev. 21:27). However, in the parallel passage, Jude use the term for "reefs" (Gr. *spilas*; see commentary on Jude 12). This shows that although Peter makes use of the text of Jude, as an independent author, he is free to depart from it when it suits his purposes.

- vv. 15-16 "They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness." The "straight way" which the false teachers have abandoned is the road that leads to God (Ps. 5:8; 27:11; Prov. 2:13; 3:6; Isa. 45:13; Mt. 3:3; Mk. 1:3; Lk. 3:4; Jn. 1:23; Acts 13:10). The cause of their departure from the path of moral purity and spiritual faithfulness is their greed (2 Pet. 2:3, 14; see 1 Tim. 6:3-10). In this, they are following in the steps of Balaam, a man of famously elastic principles (for the full story, see Numbers chs. 22-24). He initially agreed to a request from the Moabite king Balak to curse the Israelites. When God appeared to him and warned him not to do so, he prudently dismissed Balak's emissaries; however, when they returned with promises of even more money, he relented. Under protest, he continued to string Balak along with the possibility that a curse might be uttered, despite the fact that God had already warned him not to pronounce such a curse. This gained for him the rebuke of his donkey, and of an angel (Nu. 22:21-35). Throughout this narrative, Balaam flirts with sin, attempting to find a middle way between God and Balak (perhaps one that will still allow him to collect his fee), a course of action which the angel labels "reckless" (Nu. 22:32). Later, Balaam's advice was the cause of Israel intermarrying with foreign nations, resulting in Baal-worship; for this, he was executed (see Nu. 31:16-17).
- vv. 17-18 "These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error." In Jude, the false teachers are criticized as being "clouds without rain," an allusion to Prov. 25:14, "Like clouds and wind without rain is a man who boasts of gifts he does not give." Here, the equivalent phrase is "springs without water," but in both cases, the point is the same — that these men promise the world, but deliver nothing. Taking advantage of their followers' willing gullibility, they deceitfully and shamefully guarantee spiritual refreshment which will never come. In fact, those who accept their teachings and emulate their conduct will receive the opposite of a blessing: they will be condemned along with their blind guides (Mt. 15:14). These predators seek out the weak, those who have only recently managed to leave their former sinful lifestyle (2 Pet. 1:4), knowing that such people will be more easily tempted.

The "blackest darkness" referred to here echoes Jesus' statement that those who do not receive him will be cast "outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mt. 25:13; 25:30).

v. 19 "They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him." The "freedom" which these charlatans offered was the freedom to disregard God's sovereign authority and his laws, untroubled by fear concerning a final judgment. They would be "free" to indulge their own selfish desires, or to seek the good however they might individually define it, and in whatever way seemed best to them. They would live as in the days of the Judges, when "everyone did as he saw fit" (Jdg. 17:6; 21:25).

In practice, overt selfishness and apparent altruism are not that far apart. Even those who seek only their own interests can find ways to justify their conduct (Prov. 21:2). On the other hand, seeking the "good" without reference to the worship of God or the purposes of God is merely a form of idolatry, and ultimately self-serving.

But Peter tells us that all such mancentered "freedom" is illusory; in fact, it is the most oppressive kind of bondage — not to an external law or authority, but to the internal power of sin and one's own desires. True freedom means being released from the tyranny of sin's power; free to do what is right, and good, and pleasing to God. This freedom comes only through regeneration by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17, see Jn. 8:32-36; Rom. 6:7, 18-22; 8:2; Gal. 5:1; Jam. 1:25; 2:12; 1 Pet. 2:16).

vv. 20-22 In these verses, the author addresses the difficult issue of apostasy; i.e., of those who at one time profess faith in Christ, but who subsequently depart from following him. Such persons initially give every appearance of having been genuinely converted. Judas, for example, was one of Christ's closest companions, who traveled with him for three years and gave none of the Twelve any reason to question his sincerity (Jn. 13:18-28; see Mt. 26:20-22). And yet Jesus called him a "devil" (Jn. 6:70) and said "it would be better for him if he had not been born' (Mt. 26:24). This demonstrates the truth that "man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart' (1 Sam. 16:7).

Peter gives us an analogy, drawn from Prov. 26:11 and other sources: a dog or pig (both considered unclean animals in that culture) can be washed and groomed and even brought into the house. But eventually, it will revert to the filthy habits which express its true nature. In the same way, these men had temporarily "escaped the corruption of the world"; i.e., they had "cleaned up their act". But in the end, they could not conceal their true, unchanged, nature (Jn. 8:31; 1 Cor. 15:2; 1 Jn. 2:19; Heb. 4:1-2; 6:4-8; 10:26-27).

Peter's sobering warning is that to hear and understand the gospel, and to superficially embrace it, only to finally reject it, makes one liable to a greater judgment than those who never hear in the first place.

# Unit 5 – The Day of the Lord 2 Peter 3:1-10

## **Text**

<sup>1</sup>Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. <sup>2</sup>I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles.

<sup>3</sup>First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. <sup>4</sup>They will say,

<sup>3</sup>First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. <sup>4</sup>They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." <sup>5</sup>But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. <sup>6</sup>By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. <sup>7</sup>By the same word the present

heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

<sup>8</sup>But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. <sup>9</sup>The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

to repentance.

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

the	of water and by water. <sup>6</sup> By these waters also world of that time was deluged and stroyed. <sup>7</sup> By the same word the present	<sup>a</sup> 10 Some manuscripts <i>be burned up</i>
0	pen	
	What long-term goals are you working toward?	
D	iscover	
1.	In your own words, summarize the argument of the s Lord. What are they saying? What is their "evidence"	coffers concerning the promised coming of the ?
2.	As Peter explains, these scoffers make at least two leas	ogical errors in making their case. What are they?
	vv. 5-6 vv. 8-9	

3.	What does it mean that the Day of the Lord will come "l	ike a thief"? (v. 10; see 1 Thess. 5:2-4; Rev. 3:3).
	What should be our response to this fact? (see Matthew	v 24:43-44; Luke 12:39-40)
4.	What else does this passage tell us about the Day of the	ne Lord? (vv. 7, 10)
5.	What do these verses tell us about the "last days" (v. 3)	, which precede the coming Day of the Lord?
	Matthew 24:3-14	ebrews 1:1-2
	2 Timothy 3:1-5	Peter 1:18-20
	When do the last days begin and end?	
6.	Why has the Lord waited so long to return? (v. 9; see P	salm 86:15: Joel 2:13: Romans 2:4: Ezekiel 18:23
	, ( .,	
A	pply	
	What do you think it means to be prepared for the Day of the Lord? Are you ready?	Were you ever a "scoffer" concerning the promises of the Lord's return? What changed your mind?

vv. 1-2 "Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking." If this is the second letter, what was the first? The primary candidates are: (1) 1 Peter, or (2) a "lost" letter which has not come down to us. The arguments for each hypothesis revolve around the question of whether 1 Peter and 2 Peter share a common author, Peter the apostle. Clearly, there are differences of vocabulary and style between these two letters, and they address different topics. Those who consider the differences to be so great that the letters could not have been penned by the same person suggest that 2 Peter was written by an unknown author, one who wished to claim apostolic authority for his own literary production (a pseudopigrapher). However, even if that were true, it seems likely that the "pretend Peter" would have been happy to claim 1 Peter as his own prior work as well. And so, even if Petrine authorship of 2 Peter is not accepted, it is likely that the prior epistle referred to here is 1 Peter.

On the other hand, it has been argued that no self-respecting fraud would risk claiming 1 Peter as his own work, since the apparent differences between the two letters would cause his claim to be rejected. In this scenario, if 2 Peter were written by someone other than Peter, the previous letter would not be 1 Peter, but another letter unknown to us, produced by the same author.

In the end, if one accepts the traditional view that the apostle Peter was the author of both epistles which bear his name, there is no compelling reason to identify the prior letter as any other than 1 Peter. But if one rejects the Petrine authorship of 2 Peter, it becomes impossible to determine with any confidence what previous letter is being referred to here.

The fact that the recipients of 2 Peter needed a "reminder" could indicate simply that the truths they were previously taught, by word and example, had slipped their minds. However, the danger was that they would decline from a state of passive amnesia to active rejection of the truth. The false teachers represented the end point of that declension, as their "forgetting" was not inadvertent, but intentional and willful (v. 5).

What does Peter want them to recall? The "words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles". The Old Testament prophecies he has in mind are likely those which warn of God's judgment. Which "command" of Christ Peter has in view is not specified; he may be referring to all the teachings of Jesus, since the New Testament considers the gospel in its entirety to be something which must be obeyed (Rom. 6:17; Gal. 5:7; 2 Thess. 1:8).

The "wholesome thinking" which Peter wishes to provoke has both a moral and theological aspect; his desire is that they view the world clearly, in a way that is not distorted either by sin or false teaching.

- v. 3 "First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come"

  The "last days" refers to the present era, the time inaugurated by the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ, which will culminate in widespread apostasy, global evangelism, and the return of Christ to the earth (Mt. 24:3-14; Acts 2:16-17; 2 Tim. 3:1; Heb. 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:20; Jam. 5:3). The emergence of those who mockingly reject the prophecies of Christ's second advent is not an unexpected development, but rather evidence that the day is drawing near.
  - "... scoffing and following their own evil desires." The central motive for rejecting the idea of divine judgment is to allow sin free reign, without any fear of retribution to hinder its expression, or to trouble the conscience. As Dostoevsky's character Ivan Karamazov concludes, if there is no God, then "everything is permitted".
- v. 4 "They will say, 'Where is this "coming" he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." The basic argument of these skeptics (and of their heirs in every age, including our own) is that nothing ever changes; i.e. that God, if he exists, does not intervene in human history. He has not done so in the past, and therefore he will not do so in the future.

The promised "coming" is the parousia, the return of Christ in power and judgment (Mt. 10:23; 16:27; 24:3-44; 26:64; John 14:3, 18, 28; Acts 1:11; 1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 4:16; 2 Thess. 1:6-10; 2:1-4; Rev. 1:7). The "fathers" referred to here (better translated "the fathers," rather than "our fathers") could be the first generation of Christians, who have now passed from the scene. But this term more commonly refers to the ancients, or the Old Testament patriarchs. The substance of the taunt, then, is not merely that some of those who came to faith in Christ have died without seeing the promise of his return fulfilled: it is that since the beginning of recorded time, God has not acted in any kind of world-transforming way.

v. 5 "But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water." The claim of these skeptics is demonstrably false. To start with the most obvious example, creation itself represented God acting upon an inchoate mass of solid and liquid matter that was "formless and void"; separating these from one another and bringing the heavens and earth into existence (Gen. 1:1-31).

v. 6 "By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed." These oh-so-sophisticated scoffers overlook the one inconvenient truth which is fatal to their argument: God has in fact brought judgment upon all mankind in the past, just as he has promised to do in the future. So to claim that such judgment would be unprecedented, and therefore unthinkable, is simply false. A comparison between the flood in the time of Noah and the judgment that is to come was also made by Jesus (Mt. 24:37-39):

"As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away."

Doubtless those who perished in the flood had the same attitude as do many in our own day, expecting that all will continue in the future as it has in the past. But they are tragically mistaken.

- "By the same word the present heavens v. 7 and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men." The present creation is "reserved" for fire in the sense that its ultimate end is completely certain. Greek philosophers such as Plato and Heraclitus also anticipated a fiery end to the world. However, they viewed the coming cataclysm as the result of impersonal forces, and in some cases as part of a recurring cycle of destruction and renewal. Similarly, present day cosmologists have given us the "oscillating universe" theory, in which each "big bang" is followed billions of years later by a fiery "big crunch". In contrast, the true destruction by fire that is to come will happen only once, with finality, and as a result of God's Word spoken in judgment.
- With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day." This is a reference to Psalm 90:4,

"For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night."

In Psalm 90, the contrast is between God's eternality and man's transience. Here, Peter is contrasting God's view of time with ours. Although the delay between promise and fulfillment may seem interminable to us, God's point of view is very different. For him, the passage of centuries is no more significant than a long summer afternoon. Therefore, to doubt that his promises will be fulfilled, based on the excessive (from our perspective) amount of time that has passed, is badly to err. But this is exactly what the scoffers and mockers have done.

v. 9 "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." The promises of God are certain, although they may seem to us slow in coming (see Hab. 2:3). But if the "delay" is not due to any procrastination or uncertainty on God's part, then why have the promises of judgment and blessing not yet been fulfilled? What is God waiting for? The answer is that the lapse in time is due to God's grace and mercy, in order to allow sufficient opportunity for all people to turn to him in faith and repentance, so that they might escape the judgment that is to come. As the Lord describes himself, he is "the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness." (Ex. 34:6; see Num. 14:18; Neh. 9:17; Ps. 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Rom. 2:4).

Similarly, in Ezekiel, God states clearly that his desire is for the wicked to repent, rather than to be judged:

"Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?" (Ezk. 18:23; see Ezk. 18:32; 33:11).

However, his patience is not endless, and eventually the time granted for repentance will come to an end, for "he does not leave the guilty unpunished" (Ex. 34:7).

v. 10 "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare." The day of God's judgment will arrive unexpectedly (at least, for those who are not anticipating it), and without warning (Mt. 24:43-44; Lk. 12:39-40; 1 Thess. 5:2-4; Rev. 3:3, 16:15). The universe will not decay over time, slowly succumbing to entropy; instead, the entire created order will be suddenly consumed in a ferocious conflagration (see Rev. 6:12b-14; Isa. 34:4; Mt. 24:29). T.S. Eliot was wrong: the world will in fact end with a bang, rather than with a whimper.

The term rendered "elements" (Gr. stoicheia) can be used to refer to the sun, moon, and stars, or to angelic beings. But given the author's explicit statement that not only the heavenly bodies, but the earth as well, are "reserved for fire" (v. 7), the term likely indicates here the basic components of matter. As understood at the time, those would be earth, air, fire, and water.

What will be "laid bare" are all the deeds which have been done in the earth (as per ESV, "the works that are done on it" rather than NIV, "everything in it"). Everything which conceals will be stripped away; and all will be exposed to God's sight and subject to His judgment (see Heb. 4:13).

# Unit 6 – Living in Light of the End 2 Peter 3:11-18

## **Text**

<sup>11</sup>Since everything will be destroyed in this writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in way, what kind of people ought you to be? You them of these matters. His letters contain some ought to live holy and godly lives <sup>12</sup>as you look things that are hard to understand, which forward to the day of God and speed its coming.a ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do That day will bring about the destruction of the the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. <sup>17</sup>Therefore, dear friends, since you already heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. 13 But in keeping with his promise we are know this, be on your guard so that you may not looking forward to a new heaven and a new be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. <sup>18</sup>But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior earth, the home of righteousness.

14 So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. forever! Amen. <sup>15</sup>Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means <sup>a</sup>12 Or as you wait eagerly for the day of God to come salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. 16He Open ☐ Are you a saver or a spender? Do you ☐ If you could go back ten or twenty years, and focus more on the moment, or on planning invest your time or money in something with a for the future? long-term payoff, what would it be? Discover 1. What are some things that are highly valued in this world (even by Christians) that will be utterly and completely destroyed when Christ returns (vv. 11-12)? What would be the result of truly taking to heart the fact that this world, and all that is contained in it, is temporary? How might that look in your own life? (see Mt. 6:19-20) Peter teaches that, as a result of understanding what is to come in the future, Christians should respond by living "holy and godly lives" (v. 11). What does this kind of life look like?

4.	How can we "speed" the coming of the day of God? (v. 12; see Matthew 24:14, Acts 3:19-20)			
5.	What reasons do believers have to "look forw			
	2 Peter 3:13	Romans 8:1		
	2 Thessalonians 1:5-7	2 Timothy 4:8		
	1 John 3:2-3	Revelation 11:18		
6.	What is the purpose of the coming destruction? What will follow it? (v. 13; see Romans 8:19-21; Revelation 21:1)			
7.	What should be our response to the fact that some things in Paul's letters (and for that matter, other pa of the New Testament also) are hard to understand (v. 16)? What would be some wrong responses?			
8.	What should be our response to the message	e of this book? (w. 17-18)		
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	And the second district of the second	□ M/s at any constitution of the state of t		
Ш	Are there things which the "you" of ten or twenty years from now will look back and wisl you had invested in? Why not choose to do that now?	What are you investing your time, money, or talents in that will have great value when Chris returns? Little value? Do you need to adjust yo "portfolio"?		

v. 11 "Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives" We are reminded here that the purpose of this letter, for the original recipients and for us, is not merely to clarify some disputed theological points, or to provide material for a pleasant discussion around coffee and pastries. Peter intends that his warnings be taken to heart and acted upon. As James exhorts his readers, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves." (Jam. 1:22). To nod one's head in agreement with Peter, and then go on about one's business, unchanged and unaffected, would be a grave mistake, and would leave one ill-prepared for the end.

Concluding an argument in this way is typical of New Testament authors, as a concordance study of the word "therefore" will demonstrate. God is not satisfied that we give his word our intellectual or verbal assent; rather, he intends (and demands) that it be obeyed (Lk. 6:46-69; Jn. 14:23; Jam. 1:22-25; 2:14; 3:13; 1 Jn. 2:4-6). This is all the more urgent in light of Christ's imminent return (Rom. 13:12; 1 Cor. 15:50-58; Phil. 4:5; 1 Thess. 5:1-8; Jam. 5:8-9; 1 Pet. 4:7; 1 Jn. 2:28).

What does it mean to lead a "holy and godly" life? Earlier in the book, Peter lists some of the character qualities which define this phrase, such as perseverance, selfcontrol, and brotherly kindness (2 Pet. 1:3-7). Of course, the preeminent example of such a life is Christ's. He was made like us "in every way" (Heb. 2:17); that is, he shared our emotions, faced the same temptations and pressures, and experienced the same sort of physical and mental challenges as we. Yet he responded at every point in a way that was pleasing to God (Mt. 17:15; Jn. 8:29; 2 Pet. 1:17). We can also look to mature believers as models; thus, Paul's exhortation to "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." (1 Cor. 11:1).

v. 12 "... as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat." Note that Peter uses several terms to denote this time of cataclysm and renewal: the "day of God" (3:12), the "day of the Lord" (3:10), the "day of judgment" (2:9; 3:7), and "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:16; see 3:4). These phrases do not refer to separate events, but to the same event viewed from slightly different perspectives. Christians ought to look forward to this day with eager anticipation rather than fear, knowing that their sins have been atoned for by Christ, and that therefore there remains "no condemnation" for them (Rom. 8:1; see 1 Thess. 5:1-11; 2 Thess. 1:7; 2 Tim. 4:8; Tit. 2:13; Heb. 9:28; 1 Pet. 5:4; 1 Jn. 3:2-3; Rev. 11:18; 19:7-9; 22:7, 12, 14, 20).

One question remains: In what sense do we "speed its coming"? Does our conduct influence the timing of these events? And if so, how? Peter does not elaborate here, but in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, he exhorted the crowd (Acts 3:19-20):

"Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus."

Likewise, Jesus indicates that,

"this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." (Mt. 24:14)

How can these passages be reconciled with Christ's statement that "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." (Mt. 24:36; see Mk. 13:32). If God knows the precise day and hour of Christ's return, how can our repentance and obedience, and the progress of world evangelism, influence its arrival? The answer lies in the doctrines of God's omniscience and sovereignty. Yes, the return of Christ is hastened by these things. And so our waiting is not passive, but active. But since God is able to look into the future, he knows infallibly when all that is necessary to usher in that day will be accomplished, including our own works. And from another, complementary, perspective, God is able sovereignly to ensure that the freely chosen acts of his people, and even of his enemies. are in harmony with his plans and purposes (see Gen. 50:20; Job 42:2; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; Rom. 8:28; Eph. 1:11).

v. 13 "But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness."

This promise is found in Isa. 65:17,

"Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind."

Likewise, In Revelation 21:1, the apostle John relates that,

"... I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...."

The future destruction of this corrupted created order is not an end in itself. Rather, it is the necessary precondition for the glorious renewal and re-creation that God has planned (see Rom. 8:21). In our new home (which is not heaven, but a remade earth), righteousness will not be the exception, but the rule. There at last, the prayer of Christ, for God's will to be fully done (Mt. 6:10), will be answered.

v. 14 "So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him." Peter's call here to "make every effort" in pursuit of personal holiness echoes his earlier appeals that they "make every effort' to add the qualities of Christlike character to their faith (1:5-7), and that they "be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure" (1:10). This is consistent with similar exhortations in other New Testament writings (Lk. 13:24; Acts 24:16; Rom. 14:19; Eph. 4:3; Heb. 4:11; 12:14). These emphasize that living in a Godhonoring way, i.e., conforming one's conduct and character to Christ rather than to the world, requires diligence and a sustained focus over time. It is not something to be undertaken lightly (see Lk. 14:25-33). As much as we might wish that spiritual maturity would happen "automatically", these Scriptures indicate that it does not.

The reference to being found "spotless" and "blameless" (i.e., unblemished) refers back to the Old Testament sacrificial system, in which only animals that were without physical defect could be presented to God as offerings (see Ex. 12:5; 29:1; Lev. 1:3, 10; 3:1, 6). In the New Testament, these terms are symbolic of moral purity, and are applied to Christ (1 Pet. 1:19; Heb. 9:14) and to his people (Eph. 5:27; Col. 1:22; 1 Tim. 6:14).

v. 15 "Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him." Even as he whets his readers' anticipation for the return of Christ (vv. 13-14), Peter also makes an implicit appeal for perseverance in the interim, reminding them that the lapse of time has a redemptive purpose: to allow an opportunity for repentance before the day of judgment arrives (see v. 9). And from our perspective today, as we look back through the centuries, we can testify that indeed, had Christ returned within a few decades of the resurrection, many millions of souls who have since believed, from "every nation, tribe, people and language" (Rev. 7:9), would not have had the opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel.

The specific letter of Paul to which Peter is referring is unclear. Many suggestions have been made, based on the presumed recipients of 2 Peter, or on similarities between this passage and some of Paul's letters. For example:

"Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?" (Rom. 2:4; see also Rom 9:22; 1 Tim. 1:16).

The reference could even be to a letter of Paul which no longer exists. But in the end, no definitive identification is possible.

v. 16 "He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters."

The point here is that the themes Peter addresses are in harmony with the writings of Paul, and not in conflict with them, as the false teachers are likely asserting.

"His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction." The doctrine of the clarity (perspicuity) of the Scriptures was first argued by the Protestant reformers, against the Catholic view that the Bible could only be reliably interpreted by priests. For example, in The Bondage of the Will, Martin Luther writes,

"But, if many things still remain abstruse to many, this does not arise from obscurity in the Scriptures, but from their own blindness or want of understanding, who do not go the way to see the all-perfect clearness of the truth."

Some in our day argue for a kind of antiintellectual, or primitive, form of this doctrine, claiming that the meaning of any passage can be discerned by the truly pious person, without need of advanced study or scholarship. Any failure to understand, then, is laid at the feet of the insufficiently spiritual reader. However, when one considers that few Christians today read Hebrew or Greek, and thus lack the ability to understand the Scriptures as written, being dependent on at least the amount of interpretation and scholarship inherent in any translation, the absolutist arguments begin to falter. Most take a middle way; holding that the message of the Bible is not limited to ordained ministers but is accessible to all believers, and yet also accepting that the meaning of some texts are ambiguous and subject to differing interpretations.

What Peter is saying, then, is that in spite of the difficulties, the Scriptures are sufficiently clear, such that to misunderstand the central doctrines of the faith requires intentionally closing off one's heart and mind to the truth. As the Second London Baptist Confession (1689) states,

"All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of ordinary means, may attain to a sufficient understanding of them."

Who, then, risks distorting the Scriptures? Those who are "ignorant and unstable," i.e. those who have not been appropriately and sufficiently instructed, and who are therefore at the mercy of false teachers.

# **Acknowledgments**

The primary commentaries consulted in the preparation of this work were: The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude (Pillar New Testament Commentary) by Peter H. Davids and D. A. Carson; Jude and 2 Peter (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament) by Gene L. Green; and Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 50: 2 Peter, Jude by Richard J. Bauckham.

## **About the Author**

Alan Perkins is a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary, where he received the Th.M. degree with honors and the Edwin C. Deibler award in historical theology. He has many years of experience leading small groups, as a pastor and church planter, and in parachurch ministry.