

Notes on 2 Peter

2016 Edition

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Introduction

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

This epistle claims that the Apostle Peter wrote it (1:1). It also claims to follow a former letter written by Peter (3:1), which appears to be a reference to 1 Peter, although Peter may have been referring to a letter we no longer have. The author's reference to the fact that Jesus had predicted a certain kind of death for him (1:14) ties in with Jesus' statement to Peter recorded in John 21:18. Even so, "most modern scholars do not think that the apostle Peter wrote this letter."¹

The earliest external testimony (outside Scripture) to Petrine authorship comes from the third century.² The writings of the church fathers contain fewer references to the Petrine authorship of 2 Peter than to the authorship of any other New Testament book. It is easy to see why critics who look for reasons to reject the authority of Scripture have targeted this book for attack. Ironically, in this letter, Peter warned his readers of heretics who would depart from the teachings of the apostles and the Old Testament prophets, which became the very thing some of these modern critics do. Not all who reject Petrine authorship are heretics, however. The arguments of some critics have convinced some otherwise conservative scholars who no longer retain belief in the epistle's inspiration.

"There is clear evidence from the early centuries of Christianity that the church did not tolerate those who wrote in an apostle's name. In one instance (specifically *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*), the author of such a work was disciplined for doing so. Paul also condemned such practices in his Thessalonian letters (2 Thess. 3:17)."³

Regardless of the external evidence, there is strong internal testimony to the fact that Peter wrote the book. This includes stylistic similarities to 1 Peter, similar vocabulary compared with Peter's sermons in Acts, and the specific statements already mentioned (i.e., 1:1, 14; 3:1). In addition, the writer claimed to have witnessed Jesus' transfiguration (1:16-18), and to have received information about his own death from Jesus (1:13-14; cf.

¹Donald A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 659. For the arguments of these scholars and rebuttals, see *ibid*, pp. 659-63.

²The commentary by Origen (ca. A.D. 185-254) on John's Gospel (5:3).

³*The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 2128. Cf. Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 4:148-58.

John 21:18). Critics of Petrine authorship point to the many dissimilarities between 1 and 2 Peter.⁴

Assuming Peter's reference to his former letter (3:1) is to 1 Peter, he seems to have sent this second epistle to the same general audience. That audience was primarily Gentile, but also Jewish, Christians living in northern Asia Minor (cf. 1 Pet. 1:1). The background of the readers and the situation they faced, as Peter described these, fit such an audience well. Thus this was not a "catholic" epistle, namely, a general epistle sent originally to all Christians at large.

Peter's reference to his imminent departure from this life (1:13-15) suggests that the time of composition may have been just before Peter suffered martyrdom. Second Peter bears some of the marks of a last will and testament (cf. 1:3-11; 2:1-3; 3:1-4), as well as those of a letter: two literary genres. The writings of church fathers place Peter's death at A.D. 67-68 in Rome.⁵ Consequently a date of composition about A.D. 67-68 seems most likely. Early church tradition also says Peter spent the last decade of his life in Rome.⁶ Calvin, however, argued that he probably did not live that long in Rome.⁷ Nero began persecuting Christians in Rome in A.D. 64.

"Second Peter is the swan song of Peter, just as 2 Timothy is the swan song of Paul. There are striking similarities between the two books. Both epistles put up a warning sign along the pilgrim pathway the church is traveling to identify the awful apostasy that was on the way at the time and which in our time has now arrived. What was then like a cloud the size of a man's hand today envelops the sky and produces a storm of hurricane proportions. Peter warns of heresy among teachers; Paul warns of heresy among the laity."⁸

The similarities between 2 Peter 2 and the Book of Jude, especially Jude 4-18, have raised several questions. Did Peter have access to Jude's epistle, or did Jude have a copy of 2 Peter? Which book came first? Did one man use the other's material, or did both draw from a common source? The commentators and writers of New Testament introductions deal with these questions thoroughly. See them for further explanations.⁹

⁴E.g., R. H. Strachan, "The Second Epistle General of Peter," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 5:106-9. For defenses of Petrine authorship, see Alford, 4:143-44; Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, pp. 1484-85; Michael J. Kruger, "The Authenticity of 2 Peter," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42:4 (December 1999):645-71; Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, pp.199-215; A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6:139-44; and Kenneth O. Gangel, "2 Peter," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, pp. 859-61.

⁵E.g., *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus*, pp. 79-80 (bk. 2, ch. 25) and p. 82 (bk. 3, ch. 1).

⁶See Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, pp. 382-84, 471-74.

⁷See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4:6:15.

⁸J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, 5:715.

⁹D. Edmond Hiebert, *Second Peter and Jude: An Expositional Commentary*, pp. 1-20, also has an excellent discussion of the authenticity of this epistle, as do Bigg, pp. 216-32; Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, pp. 141-43; and Douglas J. Moo, *2 Peter and Jude*, pp. 17-18.

Suffice it to say that the church—through the ages—has recognized the end product of both 2 Peter and Jude as epistles that God inspired. As far as which came first, we may never know for sure until we get to heaven. The more common view today among scholars is that Jude probably wrote before Peter (or his agent) composed 2 Peter.¹⁰ However, I tend to favor the priority of 2 Peter, as do many conservative authorities.¹¹

"Most scholars, in fact, date 2 Peter in the early part of the second century and consider it the last New Testament book to have been written. The author's claim to Petrine authorship, therefore, is part of the phenomenon of 'pseudonymity' in the ancient world, whereby the authority and tradition of a revered religious figure were attributed to a later work by an anonymous author."¹²

This quotation reflects the majority of scholarly opinion but not the conviction of many conservatives, including myself. Moo noted the inconsistency of pseudonymity and inerrancy.¹³

"The purpose of 2 Peter is to call Christians to spiritual growth so that they can combat apostasy as they look forward to the Lord's return."¹⁴

OUTLINE

- I. Introduction 1:1-2
- II. The condition of the Christian 1:3-11
 - A. The believer's resources 1:3-4
 - B. The believer's needs 1:5-9
 - C. The believer's adequacy 1:10-11
- III. The authority for the Christian 1:12-21
 - A. The need for a reminder 1:12-15
 - B. The trustworthiness of the apostles' witness 1:16-18
 - C. The divine origin of Scripture 1:19-21
- IV. The danger to the Christian ch. 2
 - A. The characteristics of false teachers 2:1-3
 - B. The consequences of false teaching 2:4-10a
 - C. The conduct of false teachers 2:10b-19
 - D. The condemnation of false teachers 2:20-22

¹⁰E.g., Alford, 4:145-48; Bauckham; J. B. Mayor, "The General Epistle of Jude," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 5:211-25.

¹¹E.g., Jamieson, et al.; Moo; and Bigg.

¹²Donald Senior, "The Letters of Jude and Second Peter," *The Bible Today* 25:4 (July 1987):212. See also Bauckham, pp. 134, 145-46, 158-62; and E. M. Sidebottom, *James, Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 100.

¹³Moo, pp. 22-24.

¹⁴Gangel, p. 862.

- V. The prospect for the Christian 3:1-16
 - A. The purpose of this epistle 3:1-2
 - B. Scoffing in the last days 3:3-6
 - C. End-time events 3:7-10
 - D. Living in view of the future 3:11-16
- VI. Conclusion 3:17-18

MESSAGE

Peter wrote this epistle, as he did 1 Peter, to establish believers in their faith. He wrote both letters in obedience to Jesus' instructions to him to "strengthen your brothers" (cf. Luke 22:32). Both epistles contain reminders of fundamental Christian teaching. Both evidently were sent to the same audience, according to 2 Peter 3:1. Both deal with how to handle various kinds of trials, among other things—suffering in 1 Peter, and false teachers in 2 Peter. Both also emphasize God's grace.

The differences between these two epistles are also significant. The first epistle ends, "Stand firm in it [grace]" (5:12). Its theme is the *sufficiency* of God's grace. We need to stand fast in grace as Christians. The second epistle ends, "Grow in grace" (3:18). Its theme is the *responsibility* of grace. We need to keep growing in God's grace. This second letter builds on the first. We do not only need to *stand fast* in grace, but we also need to *keep growing* in it.

We could state the message of the book therefore as follows: "Fulfill your responsibilities as recipients of the true grace of God." The message of 1 Peter was, "Stand firm in the true grace of God."

Let us identify the major revelations of this letter:

First, as recipients of God's grace, we have resources that create responsibilities. Peter emphasized two of our resources. Our first resource is the "power of God" (1:3). God's power grants us everything we need for godly living. Godly living becomes possible when we come to know God by saving faith. We grow in our knowledge of God as we get to know Him better through study of the Scriptures. We also do so as we respond to our increasing knowledge of Him properly, by abiding in (trusting and obeying) Him.

One area of life that God's power transforms is *our spiritual vitality* or energy. God wants us to be vital Christians (John 10:10; cf. James). The opposite condition is to have no spiritual energy. God's power enables us to demonstrate His own "glory" by giving us spiritual vitality (1:3). Peter saw the glory of God manifested through Jesus Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration (1:17). God wants to manifest His glory through every Christian (3:18). People can see God's glory in our spiritual vitality. The clearest illustration of spiritual vitality is Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry. Spiritual vitality is not just enthusiasm, but also strength to persevere in the face of difficulties.

Another area of life that God's power transforms is, more specifically, *our conduct*. By conduct I mean how we conduct ourselves in thought, word, and deed—what we do, and what we do not do. God wants us to be godly Christians as well as glorious Christians. He wants us to be virtuous as well as vital. The opposite condition is ungodly and unclean. The false teachers that Peter wrote about reflected the opposite condition, and Peter described their conduct quite fully in chapter 2. God's power enables us to demonstrate His own "excellence" by making us godly (1:3). Peter heard the excellence of God testified to on the Mount of Transfiguration, when he heard God say about Jesus Christ, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (cf. 1:17-18). God wants to manifest His excellence through every Christian (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9). People can see God's excellence in the godly conduct of His children.

The second resource that Peter emphasized that every Christian has is the "promises of God" (1:4). God's promises grant us everything we need to realize our potential and to maintain our purity in godly living. These promises are "magnificent" because they are essentially great and wonderful. They are "precious" to us because they are gifts of our loving heavenly Father, and because they are the keys to realizing our potential and to maintaining our purity. These promises are like the cable that pulls skiers up a mountain. If we hold onto them, they will take us far—to new heights.

One area of life that God's promises transform is *our character*. God wants us to partake of His nature. We receive His nature (i.e., the Holy Spirit) initially when we believe His promise that Christ died for our sins. However, He wants us to partake of that nature fully in this life. When we do so, we realize our potential as the children of God. We do so by *continuing* to believe God's promises to us. As we began the Christian life by faith, we should continue to walk by faith (cf. James). Because the false teachers rejected the promises of God, they failed to realize their potential as human beings. They did not become "partakers of the divine nature."

Another area of life that God's promises transform is, more specifically, *our morality*. Again, we receive future deliverance from the penalty of sin by believing that Christ died for our sins. Nevertheless, we also receive present deliverance from the power of sin by believing other promises to us. For example, God promises us that sin will no longer have enslaving power over us (Rom. 6:14; cf. 1 Pet. 4:11; 5:11). He also promises us that He will give us a way of escape in temptation (1 Cor. 10:13). He also promises us that He will give us the desire and the ability to obey Him (Phil. 1:6). One of the promises that Peter emphasized, especially in this epistle, was the promise that Jesus Christ would return (3:4-16). When Christ returns, He will perfect us. God has given us many more promises. Relying on these is key to maintaining our purity as Christians. Because the false teachers rejected the promises of God, they failed to maintain moral purity. They did not escape the corruption that is in the world through lust.

These, then, are the resources that create our responsibility, that Peter emphasized in this epistle: God's power within us, and God's promises in His Word. Every Christian can succeed in life and in ministry, because he or she has these resources.

Next notice what Peter appealed to his readers to do in view of their resources. He called them to give diligence to do two things:

First, we should *diligently appropriate* our resources (1:5-8). We do this by responding responsibly. We must respond by fulfilling our responsibility, as well as by trusting God to fulfill His. We must exercise effort and self-discipline to develop the qualities that God wants to perfect within us (1:5-8). No one can become a strong Christian without self-discipline, and fortunately, self-discipline comes from God (Gal. 5:16, 23).

Second, we should *diligently avoid* our perils. We do this by remembering God's promises (1:9, 12-13; 3:1-2). Our tendency is to forget God's power and our responsibilities (1:9; 3:5). Our tendency is also to forget God's promises (3:4). Peter's concern was mainly that his readers not forget the promise of the Lord's return (3:9, 13). This promise should affect us by encouraging us to live pure lives (3:14). Because the false teachers chose to forget this promise, they failed to fulfill the responsibilities of God's grace. Scripture memorization and review (meditation) are valuable activities because they help us remember God's promises.

These are the major revelations in this short book. As recipients of God's grace, we have resources that create responsibilities, namely: God's power, and His promises. We, for our part, need to give diligence to our responsibilities of responding to God's power and remembering God's promises.

I would also like to suggest some applications of this epistle's message to the lives of Christians.

First, God's resources do not free us from the responsibility to diligently cultivate godliness. They increase that responsibility. The Christian life is a combination of trusting and toiling. We must balance these two things. When we neglect either responsibility, we get into trouble (1:5). We are partners with God. Our practical sanctification is a process in which we labor together with God. We are responsible to trust and to obey, to exercise faith in God and to work. We frustrate the Holy Spirit's work of sanctifying us: either if we do not trust, on the one hand, or if we do not obey, on the other. The Christian life is a lot like windsurfing, parasailing, or water skiing. We have to lean back and let God pull us out of the "stuff" (dragging influences) that holds us down. However, we also have to hold on to the rope, to keep following His leading. When we do both things, He enables us to overcome. We can even "fly" over what formerly held us in its clutches.

Second, we should cultivate habits that will help us remember our resources: God's power and promises. One of the most important reasons we should read our Bibles *regularly* is that they remind us of things that we need to remember. The same is true of memorizing Scripture, attending church services, and having fellowship with other Christians. Peter said it is better not to know Scripture than to know it and then forget it (2:21).

Third, God intended the promise of the Lord's return and the events that will follow to be important motivations for us. This is our hope. If we neglect the prophetic portions of Scripture, our motivation for godly living will sag (3:14).¹⁵

¹⁵Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 2:2:161-75.

Exposition

I. INTRODUCTION 1:1-2

Peter began his second epistle as he did, both to introduce himself to his readers, and to lay a foundation for what follows.

1:1 The writer could hardly have stated his identity more clearly than he did in this verse. "Simon" was Peter's Hebrew name, and "Peter" is the Greek translation of the nickname "Cephas" ("Rocky," cf. Matt. 16:18). There is only one Peter mentioned in the New Testament.

"Double names like 'Simon Peter' were common in the ancient Near East. Many people used both the name they were given in their native language and a Greek name, since Greek was so widely spoken."¹⁶

This is the only New Testament epistle in which the writer identified himself with a double name. Peter may have done this to suggest the two aspects of his life, before and after discipleship to Jesus Christ.¹⁷ Peter called for discipleship in this letter and referred to the changes that it produces in Christians (e.g., vv. 4-11).

Peter regarded himself, first, as a "bond-slave (or bond-servant; Gr. *doulos*) of Jesus Christ," and secondarily, as His "apostle" (cf. Rom. 1:1; Tit. 1:1). "Bond-servant of Jesus Christ" is the New Testament equivalent of "servant of the Lord" in the Old Testament. Peter mentioned his apostolic authority in his salutation, because in this epistle he dealt with false teachers. His readers needed to remember that what they were reading came from an apostle and was *authoritative*.

Peter referred to his audience in very general terms that could apply to all Christians. This reference does not help us identify exactly who the original recipients were. The "faith" of all believers is a gift from God (they had "received a faith"). Other non-biblical Greek writers used the unique Greek word translated "same kind" (*isotimos*) to describe immigrants who received citizenship privileges equal to those of native inhabitants. The word "ours" may be an editorial plural, but it is more likely a reference to the other apostles (cf. 3:2; 1 John 1:1-4; et al.). Another view is that it refers to the whole Christian community.¹⁸ A fourth view is that it refers to Jewish Christians, with whom the Gentiles had been admitted into the same fellowship.¹⁹ Some of the early Gnostic false

¹⁶Moo, p. 33.

¹⁷W. H. Griffith Thomas, *The Apostle Peter: Outline Studies in His Life, Character, and Writings*, p. 247.

¹⁸Strachan, 5:123.

¹⁹Alford, 4:389.

teachers claimed a higher level of spiritual experience that—they said—only Christians who followed their teaching could attain. However, Peter here asserted that every Christian has the same essential faith, including all of its spiritual benefits, that the apostles had.

"Throughout this chapter St. Peter is thinking of the contrast between the doctrine of the apostles and that of the False Teachers. 'Your faith,' he seems to say, 'is as honourable as ours, though you received yours from us and we received ours from Christ.'"²⁰

The Christian's faith, in both its subjective and objective aspects, comes to us through Jesus Christ's uprightness ("righteousness"). The Greek grammatical construction of the last phrase of this verse indicates that Peter believed Jesus Christ was both "God and Savior" (cf. Matt. 16:16; John 1:1; 20:28; Tit. 2:13). The single definite article governs both nouns, linking them together. This is one of many verses in the New Testament that explicitly calls Jesus "God." Jesus' role as "Savior" was one that Peter emphasized in this letter, because of his readers' need for deliverance (cf. v. 11; 2:20; 3:2, 18). Salvation is also a major theme of 1 Peter.

1:2 The first half of Peter's benediction on his readers is identical with the one he gave in his first epistle (1 Pet. 1:2). "Grace" and "peace" were the typical greetings that the Greeks and Jews used, respectively. This probably suggests that Peter wrote this epistle to a mixed audience of Christians, as he did his former letter. Both "grace" and "peace" come to us through the full "knowledge (Gr. *epignosei*) of God and of Jesus" (again equal, cf. v. 1). The Greeks, and especially the Gnostics, prided themselves on their knowledge, but Peter noted that the "knowledge of God and [of] Jesus" was the *key* to grace and peace (cf. 3:18). These blessings become ours as we get to know God intimately, by reading His Word and abiding in Him. The false teachers could offer nothing better than this.

". . . as used in 2 Peter, . . . *epignosis* [full knowledge] designates the fundamental Christian knowledge received in conversion, whereas *gnosis* is knowledge which can be acquired and developed in the course of Christian life . . ." ²¹

"In our day we are rightly warned about the danger of a sterile faith, of a 'head' knowledge that never touches the heart. But we need equally to be careful of a 'heart' knowledge that never touches the head! Too many

²⁰Bigg, p. 250.

²¹Bauckham, pp. 337-38.

Christians *know* too little about their faith; we are therefore often unprepared to explain how our 'God' differs from the 'God' of Mormonism or of the Jehovah's Witnesses."²²

II. THE CONDITION OF THE CHRISTIAN 1:3-11

"The first chapter vividly portrays the nature of the Christian life with its challenge to spiritual growth and maturity, built on a sure foundation. The second part of the epistle is a ringing polemic against the false teachers who would allure and seek to mislead God's people, while the third chapter deals with the heretical denial of the return of Christ and concludes with some fitting exhortation to the readers."²³

Second Peter is one of the few New Testament epistles in which chapter divisions consistently coincide with thought divisions.

"In seeking to prepare the readers against the danger from the false teachers, Peter states in chapter 1 that their safety lies in their clear apprehension of the nature of the new life in Christ and their spiritual growth and maturity in the faith as the best antidote against error."²⁴

A. THE BELIEVER'S RESOURCES 1:3-4

Peter reminded his readers of God's power and promises that were available to them. He did this to rekindle an appreciation for the resources God had given them in view of their present needs. This epistle begins and ends on a note of victory (cf. 3:14-18).

1:3 Grace and peace are possible because God has given ("granted to") us (all Christians) "everything" we need to live godly lives ("pertaining to life and godliness").

"Power' is one of the key-words of the epistle."²⁵

It is possible that Peter meant the apostles specifically when he wrote "us" in verses 3 and 4.²⁶ The apostles are evidently in view in verse 1 ("ours"), and they may contrast with the readers ("you") in verses 2 and 5. If this is what Peter meant, he was probably continuing to stress his apostolic authority, specifically in the teaching that follows. This would have been important, since the false teachers were claiming that their teaching was authoritative (ch. 2). However, the opening sections of most other epistles

²²Moo, p. 39.

²³D. Edmond Hiebert, "The Necessary Growth in the Christian Life: An Exposition of 2 Peter 1:5-11," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141:561 (January-March 1984):43.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Sidebottom, p. 105.

²⁶Strachan, 5:124.

that contain reminders of God's blessings (e.g., Eph. 1:3-14; 1 Pet. 1:3-9), as 2 Peter 1:3-4 does, seem to refer to *all* believers as "us." Moreover, the "ours" in verse 1 seems to be inclusive of all believers, rather than a specific reference to the apostles. On the other hand, the prologue to 1 John (1:1-4) apparently *does* refer to the apostles as "us." I have not found any commentators who believed that Peter was referring to the apostles alone in verses 3 and 4.

"Life and godliness" is probably a *hendiadys* meaning "a godly life." A "hendiadys" is a figure of speech in which the writer joins two substantives with "and," rather than using an adjective and a substantive. These resources are available to us through the full knowledge (cf. v. 2) of Jesus Christ, namely, through a proper relationship with Him (cf. Phil. 4:13; Col. 2:9-10; 2 Tim. 1:7). Lenski rightly, I believe, called *epignosis* ("full knowledge"), ". . . the key word of this epistle."²⁷

"Just as a normal baby is born with all the 'equipment' he needs for life and only needs to grow, so the Christian has all that is needed and only needs to grow."²⁸

Is what God has given us in His Spirit and His Word sufficient for a godly life, or do we also need the insights of other branches of knowledge (e.g., psychology)? Clearly our basic resources as Christians do not equip us for every task in life (e.g., auto maintenance, gardening, orthopedic surgery, etc.). This was not Peter's claim. But how do the resources that he identified and modern psychology interface? Can psychology provide tools for growth in godliness, or is the Bible sufficient in itself for this? It seems to me that Peter's point was that God's Spirit and His Word provide everything that is *essential* to godly living, not that these are the only resources that we have or should use. Peter's point was that there is nothing more that *all* believers need in order to become more godly, that He has not already made available to us (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Some people, for various reasons, need more specialized help in dealing with the obstacles to godly living that they face, which psychology may provide. Nevertheless, no one can get along without God's Spirit and His Word to make progress in godliness.

Jesus Christ "called" Peter's readers to Himself in the sense that His excellent glory ("glory and excellence"; another *hendiadys*?), attracted them to Him. "Excellent" (Gr. *aretē*) really means moral excellence or virtue (cf. v. 5). Both Christ's "glory" and His moral virtue ("excellence") appealed to the Gentiles as well as the Jews.

²⁷Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude*, pp. 271, 332. Cf. 1:2, 8; 2:20.

²⁸Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 2:437.

1:4

The Lord's "promises" come to us "through (by) these": Christ's "divine power" and the "true knowledge of Him" (v. 3). We learn to benefit from these promises as we get to know Him better ("true knowledge"), and the God-supplied "divine power" for fulfilling what He has promised comes from Him. "Granted" translates a Greek word (*doreomai*), also found in verse 3, that stresses the great worth of what God has given. "Promises" refers to biblical promises (including God's covenants) that all believers can know about, not secret promises. They are in the Scriptures. The ones Peter referred to in his first epistle deal with our inheritance (1 Pet. 1:3-5) and the Lord's return (1 Pet. 1:9, 13). Here his reference is to *all* of God's promises. They are "precious" (Gr. *timia*) because of the great worth of the spiritual riches involved (cf. 1 Pet. 1:7, 19; 2:7). They are "magnificent" (Gr. *megista*, lit. "greatest") because they are intrinsically excellent. Someone has said that you can never break God's promises by leaning on them. The Old Testament, especially, emphasizes God's faithfulness to His promises repeatedly. The biblical covenants are His big, formal promises.

". . . one of the great lessons of 2 Peter is that to maintain a holy life in a world like ours, we must be deeply rooted in the prophetic promises of God's word. Above all, we must hold fast to that 'blessed hope' of the coming again of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ [cf. Matt. 24:48-50]."²⁹

"Here, again, we have an instance of St. Peter's habit of anticipation, and a link between the introduction and the third chapter. Already the author is thinking of the doubts about the Parousia."³⁰

Christians become "partakers" of God's very "nature" by faith in His promises. In our day, as in Peter's, many people are interested in becoming partakers of "the divine nature," though they may conceive of the divine nature in non-Christian ways (Eastern mysticism, new age spirituality, etc.).³¹ Peter evidently used this phrase to capture the interest of his formerly pagan Hellenistic readers, but he proceeded to invest it with distinctively Christian meaning. He was an effective communicator.

When God saved us by faith in His promise, He indwelt us, and we therefore possess the nature of God within us (cf. John 16:7; Acts 2:39). God's nature in us manifests the likeness of God and Christ through us. It also gives us *power*, enabling us to overcome (escape) the temptations of "lust" that result in "corruption" (cf. Gal. 5:16-17). Note that Peter did not say that we *have* the divine nature (which is true), from which we might

²⁹Zane C. Hodges, "Exposition of Second Peter," *The KERUGMA Message* 1:2 (July-August 1991):4.

³⁰Bigg, p. 255.

³¹See Robert V. Rakestraw, "Becoming Like God: An Evangelical Doctrine of Theosis," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:2 (June 1997):257-69.

infer that we no longer have a sinful human nature and do not sin. He said that we *participate in* the divine nature, from which we should infer that we experience some of God's qualities—but not *all* of them here and now.

Peter spoke of our "having escaped [this] corruption" in the past (past tense verb). He meant that our justification has already assured our escape from this corruption, not that we escape it automatically simply because we are Christians. Another view is that Peter meant that Christians will become partakers of the divine nature when we die, having escaped the world's corruption through death.³² Yet we already possess the divine nature through the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit. The temptations that we presently face characterize the world as a whole (cf. 1 John 2:17). The assurance of ultimate victory over this corruption should encourage us to strive to overcome it now.

"Each man must make a choice. Either he becomes freed from sin, or he becomes further enslaved to sin."³³

"Man becomes either regenerate or degenerate."³⁴

"Godliness," "goodness" (lit. "virtue"), "divine nature," and "corruption" are all concepts that fascinated the philosophical false teachers of Peter's day. Peter reminded his readers of God's provisions for them that made them adequate, and in need of nothing that the false teachers, to whom he would refer later, said they could provide.

B. THE BELIEVER'S NEEDS 1:5-9

Having established the believer's basic adequacy through God's power *in him* and promises *to him*, Peter next reminded his readers of their responsibility to cultivate their own Christian growth. He did so to correct any idea that they needed to do nothing more because they possessed adequate resources.

"In this beautiful paragraph Peter orchestrates a symphony of grace. To the melody line of faith he leads believers to add harmony in a blend of seven Christian virtues which he lists without explanation or description."³⁵

1:5 Since believers have resources that are adequate for a godly life, they should use them diligently to grow in grace (cf. 3:18). Escaping the "corruption" of "lust" (v. 4) takes effort (cf. 1 Tim. 6:11-12; 2 Tim. 2:2). It is possible to frustrate the grace of God by having "faith without works" (James 2:20).³⁶ Therefore we must "apply all diligence." This is the most

³²See Bauckham, pp. 181-84.

³³Louis Barbieri, *First and Second Peter*, p. 96.

³⁴Strachan, 5:126.

³⁵Gangel, p. 865.

³⁶Hiebert, *Second Peter . . .*, p. 51.

basic requirement for experiencing effective Christian growth (cf. vv. 10, 15; 3:14).

"Spiritual growth in the Christian life calls for the strenuous involvement of the believer."³⁷

"Without *giving all diligence*, there is no gaining any ground in the work of holiness."³⁸

"The Christian must engage in this sort of cooperation with God in the production of a Christian life which is a credit to Him."³⁹

"Spirituality, then, is a choice. It does not come automatically or inevitably.

"Indeed, if the Christian fails to add 'virtue' to his faith, his faith will soon become what James described as 'dead faith' (James 2:14-26). Its vitality and productivity will disappear. In fact, Peter says this same thing in his own way in v. 8, 9."⁴⁰

To his "faith," as a foundation, the believer needs to add seven qualities or virtues with God's help. Each virtue contributes to the total growth of the saint. Note that Peter placed responsibility for attaining them on the Christian. Though, again, we can only make progress in godliness as God enables us.

"The Christian life is like power steering on a car. The engine provides the power for the steering, but the driver must actually turn the wheel. So the Lord provides the power to run our lives, but we must 'turn the wheel.' To a great extent the Christian determines the course of his life."⁴¹

Peter said to add in and mix together, as in a recipe, the following ingredients to produce a mature godly life. He used a literary device that was common in his day in order to impress upon his readers the importance of giving attention to each virtue. Unlike other New Testament ethical lists (except Rom. 5:3-5), Peter used a literary device called "sorites" (also called "climax" or *gradatio*). *Sorites* (from the Gr. *soros*, "a

³⁷Ibid., p. 50.

³⁸Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 1949.

³⁹Michael Green, *The Second Epistle General of Peter and the General Epistle of Jude*, p. 67.

⁴⁰Hodges, 1:3:2.

⁴¹Barbieri, p. 96.

heap") is a set of statements that proceed, step by step, to a climactic conclusion through the force of logic or reliance upon a series of indisputable facts. Each new statement picks up the last key word or phrase of the preceding one.⁴² Other examples of *sorites* are in Romans 8:29-30; 10:14-15; and James 1:15. We should not infer that before we can work on the third virtue, we must master the second, and so on. This literary device simply arranges the virtues in an advancing order, but presents them so that each one receives emphasis. The total effect is to create the impression of growing a healthy tree, for example, in which several branches are vital.

Often children want to grow up faster than they can. They sometimes ask their parents to measure their height again, perhaps only a week or two after their last measuring. The wise parent will tell the child not to be so concerned about constantly measuring his or her growth. Rather, the child should give attention to certain basic activities that will ensure good growth over time: drink your milk, eat your vegetables, get enough exercise and rest. This is the spirit of Peter's advice.

"Moral excellence" (Gr. *aretē*) is virtue or goodness (v. 3; cf. 1 Pet. 2:9). Moral purity and uprightness of character cultivated through obedience to God are in view. This Greek word describes anything that fulfills its purpose or function properly. In this context, it means a Christian who fulfills his or her calling (i.e., Matt. 22:37-39; 28:19-20; et al.).

"Knowledge" (Gr. *gnōsis*) refers to acquired information. In particular, the Christian needs to know all that God has revealed in His Word, not just the gospel (cf. Matt. 28:19-20).

"*Gnōsis* here is the wisdom and discernment which the Christian needs for a virtuous life and which is progressively acquired. It is practical rather than purely speculative wisdom (cf. Phil 1:9)."⁴³

"Christian prudence regards the persons we have to do with and the place and company we are in."⁴⁴

1:6 "Self-control" (Gr. *egkrates*) means mastery of self, disciplined moderation, controlling one's desires and passions (cf. Prov. 16:32; 25:28; Acts 24:25; 1 Cor. 9:24-27; Gal. 5:23; Phil. 3:12-16; 1 Tim. 4:7-8; James 4:17). Many of the early Christian heresies taught that since the body was evil (some claimed) or unimportant (others claimed), it was not necessary to curb fleshly lusts, only to think correctly.

⁴²See H. A. Fischel, "The Uses of Sorites (*Climax, Gradatio*) in the Tannaitic Period," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 44 (1973):119.

⁴³Bauckham, p. 186.

⁴⁴Henry, p. 1949.

"Any religious system which claims that religious knowledge emancipates from the obligations of morality is false."⁴⁵

"Perseverance" is the need to keep on keeping on in spite of adversity. It is patient endurance in holiness when we encounter temptation to give in or to give up (cf. Rom. 5:3-4; 15:4-5; 2 Cor. 1:6; 6:4; Col. 1:11; 1 Thess. 1:3; 2 Thess. 1:4; James 1:3). The Greek word (*hypomonē*) literally means to remain under something, such as a heavy load.

"Many folk have the wrong concept of what patience really is. They think it means sitting in a traffic jam on the freeway in the morning without worrying about getting to work. Well, that is not patience. It just gives you an excuse for being late to work. Patience is being able to endure when trials come."⁴⁶

"Godliness" (Gr. *eusebeia*) refers to behavior that reflects the character of God (cf. v. 3; 3:11; et al.). It presupposes a desire to please God in all the relationships of life.

1:7 "Brotherly kindness" (Gr. *philadelphia*) is thoughtful consideration of fellow believers (cf. 1 Pet. 1:22; 3:8; Rom. 12:10; 1 Cor. 12:25-26; 1 Thess. 4:9; Heb. 13:1). Overt acts of kindness manifest this characteristic (Gal. 6:10).

"Love" (Gr. *agape*) is the highest form of love, God's kind, that seeks the welfare of the person loved above its own welfare (John 3:16; 13:35; Gal. 5:22; 1 Pet. 4:8; et al.). It reaches out to all people, not just fellow believers.

This list of qualities begins with those inside the believer, and progresses to those he or she demonstrates outwardly, and from the more elemental to the more advanced. It moves from private to public qualities. This list begins with faith (v. 5) and ends with love. Another, shorter virtue list that begins with faith and ends with love, is in 2 Corinthians 8:7.

"Christian faith is the root from which all these virtues must grow, and Christian love is the crowning virtue to which all the others must contribute. In a list of this kind, the last item has a unique significance. It is not just the most important virtue, but also the virtue which encompasses all the others. Love is the overriding ethical principle from which the other virtues gain their meaning and validity."⁴⁷

⁴⁵Hiebert, "The Necessary . . .," p. 46.

⁴⁶McGee, 5:723.

⁴⁷Bauckham, p. 193.

This is a good checklist that helps us evaluate whether we are all that God wants us to be. These are the traits of a maturing Christian whose faith is vital, not dead.⁴⁸

"Their presentation here seems to observe an order from the more elemental to the more advanced, but they are all of them facets of the Spirit's work in the life of a believer, aspects of the glory of the indwelling Christ, his character shown in the Christian's character."⁴⁹

Each child in a family bears some resemblance to his or her parents, while at the same time remaining distinctive. So each growing Christian normally manifests similarities to Christ, and yet remains different from every other Christian.

Ultimately, any progress in godliness that we make is due to God's enabling grace. When I was a small boy, my parents gave me money to buy them Christmas presents. I was using "my money" to buy them presents, but "my money" had come from them. Likewise, all that we have, including the desire and the ability to please God, comes from Him. But we must choose to use what He has given us to pursue *godliness*. Olympic athletes do not just wake up one day and compete. They spend months and even years in training. Likewise those who run the Christian "race" must pursue godliness diligently.

Unfortunately, many Christians prefer a different approach: instant sanctification (transformation) through a crisis experience, perhaps at some revival meeting. Our *instant gratification* culture encourages this approach, rather than the regular development of these qualities over a long period of time.

1:8 We must continue to grow in these "*qualities*" as well as possessing them ("are yours and are increasing"); we must grow in grace (3:18). Failure to do so will make us "useless" (Gr. *argous*) in God's hands as His tools in the world (cf. James 2:20; cf. Matt. 20:3, 6), and "unfruitful" (Gr. *akarpous*) as communicators of His life (John 15:2, 4; cf. Mark 12:12-14, 20-26). This is so even though we have received everything necessary for godly living through the knowledge of Christ (v. 3). "Render you neither useless nor unfruitful" is a *litotes*, a figure of speech that affirms an idea by denying its opposite.

"Idle' (*argous*) is literally 'unworking'; it is not a picture of one unavoidably unemployed but of one who avoids labor for which he should assume responsibility."⁵⁰

⁴⁸See Frederic R. Howe, "The Christian Life in Peter's Theology," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157:627 (July-September 2000):309-13.

⁴⁹Stephen W. Paine, "The Second Epistle of Peter," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1458.

⁵⁰Hiebert, *Second Peter* . . . , p. 56. Cf. Matt. 20:3, 6.

When we diligently add these virtues to our lives, we will be both useful and fruitful, and we will evidence "true knowledge (Gr. *epignosis*) of our Lord Jesus Christ." "True knowledge" of Him involves not just intellectual understanding then, but knowledge that comes *through obedience*. This growth should be the goal of every believer (cf. 3:18).

"Each advance in the Christian life deepens and widens our spiritual understanding."⁵¹

"Some of the most effective Christians I have known are people without dramatic talents and special abilities, or even exciting personalities; yet God has used them in a marvelous way. Why? Because they are becoming more and more like Jesus Christ. They have the kind of character and conduct that God can trust with blessing. They are fruitful because they are faithful; they are effective because they are growing in their Christian experience."⁵²

1:9 The absence of these virtues gives evidence of lack of true knowledge. Peter described this condition as spiritual blindness to the realities connected with their relationship with God and, in particular, *shortsightedness* (lit. "myopia," Gr. *myopazo*). Such people show concern mostly about living for the present, with little regard for the future (cf. Esau). James called this dead faith (James 2:17, 26).

Many Christians have forgotten how much God has forgiven them, or they have appreciated His forgiveness only superficially.

"As is usual in the Bible, the idea of 'forgetting' is not a mental process but a practical failure to take into account the true meaning and significance of something."⁵³

Often it is both in our lives.

Those who "have forgotten" have little motivation to grow in grace and thereby please God. They do not add the seven ingredients to their faith that Peter urged. Peter referred to this omission as forgetting one's "purification from his" or her "former sins." Having forgotten one's *escape* from "the corruption that is in the world through lust" (v. 4), this person fails to see the importance of present purification through continued Christian growth.

⁵¹Strachan, 5:127.

⁵²Wiersbe, 2:439.

⁵³Moo, p. 48.

This is one of the most practical and helpful passages in the New Testament dealing with spiritual growth. Peter here presented both the reason for, and the method of, this growth—clearly and attractively.

"Peter was certainly a spiritual realist even if many modern theologians are not. He does not take it for granted that spiritual growth will occur automatically or inevitably. Indeed, the character development he thinks of cannot occur apart from the believer 'giving all diligence' toward that end (v 5). This does not mean, of course, that the believer does this all on his own. God supplies the basic resources and provides help along the way. But Christian growth *will not occur* apart from our diligent participation in the process. If we learn nothing else from this passage, we must learn this. We do not passively experience Christian growth, but actively pursue it!"⁵⁴

C. THE BELIEVER'S ADEQUACY 1:10-11

Peter concluded this section on the nature of the Christian by assuring his readers that simply practicing what he had just advocated would prepare them adequately for the future. He did this to help them realize that they had no need for the added burdens that false teachers sought to impose on them.

1:10 In view of what Peter had just said (vv. 3-9), it was imperative that his readers make the proper moral response. By doing so, they would give evidence that they were genuine Christians. The evidence of divine nature in a person demonstrates his or her salvation. Conversely, if a person gives no evidence of having the divine nature, then his or her salvation is in doubt as others observe that one. By cultivating the seven virtues, other people could see the divine nature more clearly in the Christian who had them. This would make God's "calling and election (choosing)" of him or her clearer to everyone.

"All Christians have been called and selected, otherwise they would not be Christians, but they must 'work out their own salvation' (Phil. II. 12)."⁵⁵

"The Christian who progressively develops these virtues in his life will grow steadily. This growth will be obvious proof that he has been elected by God."⁵⁶

"The Christian life is not a list of propositions or a tight theological system; it is a vital relationship to a resurrected Lord. The commandments He gave us and the theological systems we devise as an understanding of those

⁵⁴Hodges, 2:1:3. Cf. Rom. 8:12-13; Phil. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:14-16.

⁵⁵Bigg, p. 261.

⁵⁶Barbieri, p. 100.

propositional truths exist only to help us live in a vital relationship with Christ day by day as we follow Him as Lord."⁵⁷

Another reason for adding these virtues is that by doing so, we can walk worthy of the Lord *without stumbling* along the way (cf. Jude 24). Loss of salvation is obviously not in view here. Peter said we might "stumble," not "fall completely," unable to rise again.

"We do not stumble when we are giving attention to where we are stepping. We stumble when we become preoccupied with other things and do not pay attention to where we are going."⁵⁸

Neither is this verse saying that our assurance of salvation rests on our good works. Our assurance of salvation rests on the promise of God that everyone who believes in Jesus Christ as Savior has eternal life (John 3:16; 5:24; Rom. 5:1; 8:38-39; 1 John 5:11-13).

"This passage does not mean that moral progress provides the Christian with a subjective assurance of his election (the sense it was given by Luther and Calvin, and especially in seventeenth-century Calvinism) . . ."⁵⁹

"Nowhere in the Bible is a Christian asked to examine either his faith or his life to find out if he is a Christian. He is told only to look outside of himself to Christ alone for his assurance that he is a Christian. The Christian is, however, often told to examine his faith and life to see if he is walking in fellowship and in conformity to God's commands."⁶⁰

What "make certain about His calling and choosing you" *does* mean, is that by pursuing Christian growth, we *give evidence* that He really did call and choose us. The uncalled and unchosen have no desire to become useful and fruitful by growing in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 8).

1:11 One of the greatest motivations for pursuing growth in grace, is that, when we go to be with the Lord forever, He will welcome us warmly. The alternative is to get in by the skin of our teeth, "saved so as by fire" (1 Cor. 3:15). Every Christian will enter Christ's millennial kingdom and receive

⁵⁷Paul A. Cedar, *James, 1, 2 Peter, Jude*, p. 213.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

⁵⁹Bauckham, p. 190.

⁶⁰Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, p. 288. Cf. pp. 295-99. His twelfth and thirteenth chapters on faith and assurance, pp. 271-91, and self-examination and faith, pp. 293-310, are helpful. See also Hodges, 2:2:3.

much eternal inheritance (1 Pet. 1:3-5). However, our Lord's welcome of those who have sought to express their gratitude for His grace through a life dedicated to cultivating godliness will be especially warm. It will be even warmer than what He extends to other, less committed believers (cf. Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 12:21, 31; Acts 7:56). The "kingdom" in view seems to refer specifically to Christ's messianic kingdom, that will begin on this earth when He returns, and then continue forever on the new earth (cf. 2 Tim. 4:18).⁶¹

"This passage agrees with several in the Gospels and Epistles in suggesting that while heaven is entirely a gift of grace, it admits of degrees of felicity, and that these are dependent upon how faithfully we have built a structure of character and service upon the foundation of Christ. Bengel likens the unholy Christian in the judgment to a sailor who just manages to make shore after shipwreck, or to a man who barely escapes with his life from a burning house, while all his possessions are lost. In contrast, the Christian who has allowed his Lord to influence his conduct will have abundant entrance into the heavenly city, and be welcomed like a triumphant athlete victorious in the Games. This whole paragraph of exhortation is thus set between two poles: what we already are in Christ and what we are to become. The truly Christian reader, unlike the scoffers, will look back to the privileges conferred on him, of partaking in the divine nature, and will seek to live worthily of it. He will also look forward to the day of assessment, and strive to live in the light of it."⁶²

The writer just quoted also suggested that the underlying picture is of a victor in the Olympic Games, returning to his hometown in triumph.⁶³

". . . there will be degrees of glory hereafter proportioned to our faithfulness in the use of God's gifts here."⁶⁴

"Here is an intimation that heaven's society will not be classless. Good stewardship of Christ's riches will bear eternal proceeds. The Christian endowed with wealth through Christ's provision, invests and saves for future wealth (cf. I Tim 6:9)."⁶⁵

⁶¹Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, p. 433.

⁶²Green, pp. 76-77.

⁶³Ibid., p. 75. See also Wiersbe, 2:440.

⁶⁴B. C. Caffin, "The Second Epistle General of Peter," in *The Pulpit Commentary*, p. 6. Cf. 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2 Cor. 5:10.

⁶⁵Stephen W. Paine, "The Second Epistle of Peter," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1458.

It is remarkable that so many commentators take verse 11 as indicating that *entrance into heaven* depends on our diligently seeking to grow in grace. Understandably, Pelagians and Arminians hold this view, but even some Calvinistic interpreters, who profess to believe that salvation depends on *grace alone*, have come to this conclusion.

III. THE AUTHORITY FOR THE CHRISTIAN 1:12-21

Perhaps Peter sensed that his readers might resist his teaching that believers must diligently pursue godliness, since he proceeded to remind them that his apostolic witness was in line with divine inspiration.

A. THE NEED FOR A REMINDER 1:12-15

Peter returned to the subject of God's promises (v. 4). He developed the importance of the Scriptures as the resource of the believer. He did so to enable his readers to appreciate their value, and to motivate them to draw upon them so they would grow in grace.

"These verses make it obvious that Peter's primary concern in this epistle is not to refute the false teachers but to ground his readers in personal holiness."⁶⁶

1:12 In view of what he had written to this point, Peter explained that he realized his previous words were a *reminder* to his readers, not new instruction. Verses 3-11 contain basic Christian life "truth." His readers had heard this previously, but they, as all believers, needed a reminder of it periodically so they would not forget (v. 9).

"We must not glide lightly over Peter's concern about reminding the readers of already known and familiar truth. The history of the Church as a whole shows how careless the Church can be about clinging to divine revelation. So bad have things become in our own day, that the truth of justification by faith alone and of salvation as a free gift has already been submerged and lost among many evangelicals. The Reformation almost needs to occur again!"⁶⁷

1:13-14 Peter's "*earthly dwelling*" (lit. "tent") was his physical body (cf. 2 Cor. 5:1, 4). The Greek word *apothesis* means "a divesting," and it refers elsewhere to removing clothes (cf. Acts 7:58). We do not know exactly how Peter knew someone would *soon* separate his mortal body from his spirit. Peter's words allow for the possibility of separation by either death or translation. Both events were "imminent": overhanging. He was probably at least in his 50s, if not older, when he wrote 2 Peter, and he

⁶⁶Hiebert, *Second Peter* . . . , pp. 63-64.

⁶⁷Hodges, 3:1:3.

may have known that he would *soon* die as a martyr. The Lord Jesus had told Peter that his earthly life would end as a captive of some kind (John 21:18-19). Alford argued that Peter meant that his imminent death would be sudden, rather than soon.⁶⁸ But "imminent" implies "soon" more than "sudden."

J. Sidlow Baxter noted the danger of knowledge without practice, in verses 9-14, and the danger of life without growth, in verses 3-8.⁶⁹

1:15 Peter wrote this epistle specifically, among other reasons, so that after his death, his exhortation contained in it would be a permanent reminder to his brethren. It was his "testament" (cf. 2 Tim.). Whether Peter realized God was inspiring this epistle or not, he regarded it as containing very important and helpful information for Christians. We believe God *did inspire* it, and consequently what Peter said of the value of this letter applies to the rest of Scripture as well. We, too, need reminders of what God has revealed. Mark's Gospel may also have been in Peter's mind when he wrote this.⁷⁰ There is good evidence that Peter's preaching formed the basis of the second Gospel.

"Certainly no document would redeem the apostles' promise so well as a gospel; and if a gospel is meant, the reference can hardly be to any other than that of St. Mark."⁷¹

B. THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE APOSTLES' WITNESS 1:16-18

Peter explained that his reminder came from one who was an eyewitness of Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry—namely, *himself*. He did so to heighten respect for his words in his readers' minds. This section begins Peter's defense of the faith that the false teachers were attacking, which continues through much of the rest of the letter.

1:16 The apostles had not preached myths ("cleverly devised fables") to their hearers, as the false teachers to whom Peter referred later in this epistle were doing. The apostles' testimony rested on historical events that they had observed personally ("eyewitnesses of His majesty"). They had seen Jesus' power in action ("we were eyewitnesses") during His first coming as God's anointed Messiah. Jesus Christ's "majesty" appeared especially clearly on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-8). "Power" and "coming" are a *hendiadys* that means "powerful coming," with emphasis on the fact that Jesus' coming was *with power*. This is the only explicit mention of the Transfiguration outside the Synoptic Gospels.

⁶⁸Alford, 4:395.

⁶⁹J. Sidlow, Baxter, *Explore the Book*, 6:311.

⁷⁰Hodges, 3:1:4; Robertson, 6:155.

⁷¹Bigg, p. 265.

1:17-18 The apostles' message was essentially that Jesus was the Christ (i.e., God's promised Messiah; cf. 1 John 5:1). God had revealed this clearly at Jesus' transfiguration, when He had announced that Jesus was His "beloved Son" (Matt. 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35). Peter referred to that event to establish the credibility of his witness and that of the other apostles. The terms "honor," "glory," "Majestic Glory," and "holy mountain" all enhance the special event that was the Transfiguration.

"The author is . . . pointing out to his readers that the Transfiguration, to which the apostles bore witness, is a basis for the expectation of the Parousia. . . .

"The emphasis of the account is that *God himself* has elected Jesus to be his vicegerent, appointed him to the office and invested him with glory for the task."⁷²

C. THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF SCRIPTURE 1:19-21

Peter proceeded to emphasize that the witness of the apostles, as well as the witness of Scripture, came from God. He did this to help his readers see that their choice for authority boiled down to accepting either *God's Word*, or the *word of men*—who disagreed with God's Word (i.e., the false teachers).

"Peter points out the character of the prophetic Word (v. 19a), pictures the present function of biblical prophecy (v. 19b), and stresses the origin of prophecy (vv. 20-21)."⁷³

"The reliability of revelation is the idea that links verses 16-18 and verses 19-21."⁷⁴

1:19 "And" introduces a conclusion that Peter drew. The meaning of the clause, "we have the prophetic word made more sure," (NASB) or, "we have the word of the prophets made more certain," (NIV) is not completely obvious. It may mean, on the one hand, that the voice which the three apostles heard at the Transfiguration (vv. 17-18) confirmed the words of the Old Testament prophets concerning the deity of Christ. On the other hand, it may mean that the prophetic Old Testament Scriptures confirm the witness of the apostles (cf. Rom. 15:8). The latter view seems more probable to me, because of the Greek grammar. However, many good scholars prefer the former view.⁷⁵

⁷²Bauckham, p. 222.

⁷³D. Edmond Hiebert, "The Prophetic Foundation for the Christian Life: An Exposition of 2 Peter 1:19-21," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141:562 (April-June 1984):159.

⁷⁴Moo, p. 75.

⁷⁵E.g., Lenski, p. 292; Edwin Blum, "2 Peter," in *Hebrews-Revelation*, vol. 12 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 274; Gangel, p. 868; Jamieson, et al., p. 1489; J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude*, pp. 320-21; and Robertson, 6:157.

"More sure' (*bebaioteron*) renders a comparative adjective that is in the predicate position and placed emphatically forward. A literal rendering of this statement is, 'We have more sure the prophetic Word.'"⁷⁶

"You [will] do well" was a common way of saying "please" in the *papyri* (cf. James 2:3).⁷⁷ The "papyri" are documents written in *koine* (common) Greek that deal with many everyday, non-biblical matters, such as judicial proceedings, tax receipts, marriage contracts, birth and death notices, business dealings, private letters, and a host of others, which date from the New Testament period.

That witness was similar to a "light (lamp) shining in" a darkened heart and world ("a dark place"). It would remain *shining* until the coming of Christ who, as the true "Morning Star," fully enlightens ("arises in") believers' "hearts" (cf. Rev. 22:16). The *morning star* in the physical world is the star (actually a planet, usually Venus) that appears late at night, just before dawn, and announces the arrival of a new day. Just so, Jesus Christ's return at the Rapture will signal the beginning of a new day, the day of the Lord. "The day of the Lord," as the Old Testament prophets used it in reference to a far distant day in which God will act dramatically in history, includes the Tribulation and the Millennium.

"In this phrase ['in your hearts'] Peter seemed concerned about the inner attitude of those who await the glorious day of Christ's return. The truth that Christ is coming again must first arise in their hearts, like the morning star, giving inner assurance that that day is coming. Assured of His impending return, they will be alert to detect the gleams of dawn breaking through the darkness."⁷⁸

Peter's point was, that until the Lord returns, his readers should give attention to the Old Testament and to the apostles' teaching, especially since false teachers were perverting them.⁷⁹ That was the only real light available to enlighten them. The alleged light of the false teachers was no light at all.

1:20 Peter wanted to add a word of clarification about Old Testament predictions. "First of all" probably means that what Peter proceeded to say was of *first importance*. Bible students have recognized that what Peter said about messianic prophecy, in particular, is true of all prophecy

⁷⁶Hiebert, "The Prophetic . . .," p. 159. Cf. Barbieri, p. 105; Green, pp. 86-87; Bigg, pp. 267-69; G. T. C. Fronmuller, "The Second Epistle General of Peter," in Lange's *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, 12:19-20; and Sidebottom, p. 110.

⁷⁷Sidebottom, p. 111.

⁷⁸Hiebert, "The Prophetic . . .," p. 163.

⁷⁹Cf. Kelly, p. 321.

generally. "Prophecy" is another word for the "Word of God," since it is what the Old Testament writers "spoke forth," the literal meaning of the Greek word *propheteia*, translated "prophecy."

"Although some have taken this phrase [of one's own interpretation] to mean that no individual Christian has the right to interpret prophecy for himself or herself, the context and the Greek word for *interpretation* indicates another meaning for the verse. The Greek word for *interpretation* can also mean 'origin.'"⁸⁰

Verse 21 helps explain what Peter meant by the last clause in verse 20.

1:21 What we have in Scripture did not originate in the minds of men ("by an act of human will"), but in the mind "of God."

"False teaching flows from the minds of men and women; truth flows from the heart and mind of the living God."⁸¹

The prophets did not simply give their "own" views ("interpretation") of how things were, or would be (v. 20). They "spoke" as God's mouthpieces, articulating His thoughts in words that accurately represented those thoughts.

"Spake' implies that, both in its original oral announcement, and now even when in writing, it has been always, and is, *the living voice* of God *speaking* to us through His inspired servants."⁸²

The Holy Spirit "moved" the prophets to do so, just as the wind moves a sailboat (cf. John 3:8). The same Greek verb (*phero*) occurs in Acts 27:15 and 17 to describe that action.

"The Spirit, not human volition, is the originating power in prophecy."⁸³

"Thus, the highest proof of Scripture derives in general from the fact that God in person speaks in it."⁸⁴

This passage does not explain specifically how the Holy Spirit did this. However, in view of what we find elsewhere in Scripture, we know He did it without overriding the vocabulary and style of the prophet. In some cases, the writers of Scripture used other resource materials (e.g., Josh.

⁸⁰*The Nelson . . .*, p. 2131.

⁸¹Cedar, p. 218.

⁸²Jamieson, et al., p. 1489.

⁸³Hiebert, "The Prophetic . . .," p. 166.

⁸⁴Calvin, 1:7:4.

10:13; 1 Kings 14:19; Luke 1:3; et al.). Even though verses 20 and 21 do not describe the method of inspiration in detail, they clearly affirm the basic method and the fact of inspiration. God is the Author of Scripture (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16). He guided the writers of Scripture to record His *words* "by [His] Holy Spirit."

"Peter's statement recognizes both the divine and the human element in the production of Scripture. Any balanced doctrine of the origin of Scripture must recognize both."⁸⁵

"A prevailing view is that the reference is to the reader's own efforts to understand written prophecy, that 'one's own interpretation' must not be imposed on a specific prophetic passage. Under this view the problem is the method of interpreting prophecy. Yet Peter does not tell how believers are to interpret prophecy.

"Varied views as to the meaning of 'one's own interpretation' are offered. (1) The believer as a private individual does not have the ability to interpret prophecy but needs ecclesiastical direction. But many scriptural prophecies have been rightly understood by the common reader apart from any ecclesiastical guidance; nor have the views of 'authorized interpreters' always been uniform. (2) A prophecy must not be interpreted in isolation but needs the light of the unfolding fulfillment thereof. While it is true that Christians' understanding of prophecy now is often vague and uncertain, to hold that it cannot be understood till it is fulfilled makes valueless the present lamp of prophecy. (3) Prophetic predictions should not be interpreted in isolation from other Scriptures. It is obvious that each prophecy must be so interpreted as to be consistent with other prophecies; but this does not prove that any individual prophecy in itself is obscure. Peter has just declared that Old Testament prophecy was a shining lamp. And its light is clearer now that Christ has come in His First Advent. (4) It is not the individual but the Holy Spirit who must interpret, as well as inspire, prophecy. This is true, but it does not invalidate or eliminate the human effort to understand. These views do not arise out of the main thought of the context.

"More probable is the view that the statement concerns the origin of prophecy and relates to the prophet himself. This is the view of the New International Version: 'No prophecy of Scripture comes from the prophet's own interpretation.'

⁸⁵Hiebert, "The Prophetic . . .," p. 166.

The meaning, then, is that no prophecy arose out of the prophet's own solution to the scenes he confronted or his own interpretation of the visions presented to his mind. Calvin remarked that the prophets 'did not blab their inventions of their own accord or according to their own judgments.' [John Calvin, "The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and the First and Second Epistles of St. Peter," in *Calvin's Commentaries*, p. 343.] The false prophets of Jeremiah's day were charged with doing precisely this (Jer. 23:16-17, 21-22, 25-26; Ezek. 13:3).

"The view that prophecy did not arise 'from one's own interpretation' (ablative case) is supported by the natural meaning of the verb (*ginetai* ["was made," "had its origin," or "came"]); it is in harmony with the scriptural picture of prophecy; and it is in accord with the following verse. It is supported by Peter's picture of the prophets in 1 Peter 1:10-12. The prophetic lamp 'was neither fashioned nor lighted by the prophet himself,' and its divine origin offers 'a distinct and powerful motive for taking heed to the prophetic word, and one well fitted to produce a patient and reverent and docile spirit of investigation.'"⁸⁶

"Peter is not here warning against personal interpretation of prophecy as the Roman Catholics say, but against the folly of upstart prophets with no impulse from God."⁸⁷

In this section (vv. 12-21), Peter reminded his readers that they had adequate resources for their own spiritual growth in the apostles' teachings and in the Old Testament.

IV. THE DANGER TO THE CHRISTIAN CH. 2

Peter next warned his readers of the false teachers, who presented a message contradictory to that of the apostles, to help them avoid their influence. In chapter 1, Peter stressed the importance of building oneself up spiritually. In chapter 2, he described the reason it is important to be strong. He began by describing the characteristics of false teachers, then the consequences of their teaching, then their conduct, and finally their condemnation. The connecting link with the end of chapter 1 is the reference to the false prophets of Old Testament times.

"Only Christ's withering woes on hypocritical leaders in Matthew 23 and the parallel picture in the Epistle of Jude convey the same severe denunciation of false teachers contained in this chapter."⁸⁸

⁸⁶John Lillie, *Lectures on the First and Second Epistles of Peter*, p. 428. Cf. Bigg, p. 270.

⁸⁷Robertson, 6:159. See also Hiebert, *Second Peter . . .*, pp. 81-82; and Buist M. Fanning, "A Theology of Peter and Jude," in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 462-65.

⁸⁸D. Edmond Hiebert, "A Portrayal of False Teachers: An Exposition of 2 Peter 2:1-3," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141:563 (July-September 1984):255.

This whole chapter gives evidence of being written out of great emotional concern. Peter did not discuss his subject of false teachers in a cool, dispassionate fashion. He kept returning to previous thoughts and adding additional information. Some of his sentences are quite long and involved. His thoughts seem to have been rushing ahead of his ability to state them.

It may be helpful to think of 2 Peter as similar to a bologna (baloney) sandwich. The first and third chapters deal with the condition, authority, and prospects of the Christian, and they frame the middle, second chapter, which deals with false teachers and their false teaching: the "baloney" part.

A. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF FALSE TEACHERS 2:1-3

2:1 "The people" in view are God's people in Old Testament times, the times to which Peter had just been referring (1:19-22). "False prophets" in Old Testament times sought to lead God's people away from the revelations of the true prophets (cf. Num. 22—24; Jer. 6:13; Ezek. 13:9). "False teachers" in Peter's time would try to lead God's people away from the teaching of the apostles. These men—they were typically males in Peter's day—would arise from the believers ("among you"; cf. Jer. 5:31; 23:9-18; Acts 20:29). The term "false prophets" (Gr. *pseudoprophetai*) may refer to those who falsely claim to be prophets of God, and or those who prophesy falsely. Likewise, "false teachers" (Gr. *pseudodidaskaloi*) can refer to those who claim to be teachers of God's truth, but whom the churches' leaders do not recognize as teachers, and or those who teach falsehood. This is the only place that this Greek word for false teachers occurs in the New Testament.

Peter's contrast between false prophets in Israel and false teachers in the church may suggest that teachers in the church had replaced prophets in Israel. However, other references to prophets and teachers in the New Testament indicate that *both* were present in the church, and *both* were present in Israel. The contrast intended, therefore, must not be between former prophets and present teachers, but between the true communicators of God's Word and the false.

In Israel, prophets were the more prominent communicators of God's truth, whereas in the church, teachers were. In Peter's audience, Jewish rabbis and other teachers who professed to communicate God's truth posed the greatest threat to the Christians. By comparing false teachers in the church with false prophets in Israel, Peter was saying that, just as there were those who misrepresented God in Israel, so there would be those who misrepresent Him in the church.

"Secretly introduce" literally means "to bring in alongside" (other teaching). The heretics would seek to add some other teaching to the orthodox faith, and or some other teaching as a substitute for the truth (cf. Gal. 2:4). The implication is that they would seek to do this in some

underhanded way. They would unobtrusively change the doctrinal foundation of the church with "destructive heresies," and thereby make it unstable. "Heresies" refers to ideas inconsistent with the revealed truth of God.

These men would even go so far as repeatedly or typically denying (present participle in Greek) teaching and practices associated with Christ. The inconsistency of their position is that they deny the Person they profess to submit to as Christians, their "Master" (Gr. *despoten*), the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter himself had denied Jesus three times, so he did not want others to follow his example.

When Jesus Christ died, He paid the penalty for everyone's sins, and *redeemed* ("purchased," Gr. *agorasanta*) every human being in this sense, even unbelievers (John 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:4-6; 4:10; Acts 17:30; Heb. 2:9; 1 John 2:2). This verse supports the doctrine of unlimited atonement, the view that Jesus Christ died for everyone, not just for those whom He would later save. One limited atonement advocate believed that the whole case for unlimited atonement hangs on this verse.⁸⁹ This is an oversimplification. Another writer said, "... no assertion of universal redemption can be plainer than this."⁹⁰

Peter was not claiming that all the false teachers were Christians. In view of how he described them, most of them appear to have been unbelievers (cf. vv. 4-6). However, some of them could have been believers. Peter could have made it clear if he had in mind either unbelievers or believers exclusively, but he did not. Therefore, the warning concerns *any* false teacher, unbeliever or believer. Of course, frequently only the teacher himself knows whether he is an unbeliever or a believer; others cannot tell.

"... New Testament writers sometimes use the language of Christian conversion for such people [non-Christians] on the basis of their appearance."⁹¹

The "destruction" of these heretics will be "swift" in the sense that when their judgment descends it will be *sudden*, not that it was about to descend shortly after Peter wrote. They were saying that the Lord was slow in coming to exercise judgment (3:9). Yet their own judgment was imminent (Gr. *taxinen*). Their spiritual, rather than their physical destruction, seems to be in view primarily. In the case of Christian false teachers who

⁸⁹Gary D. Long, *Definite Atonement*, p. 68. For an analysis of Long's arguments, see Andrew D. Chang, "Second Peter 2:1 and the Extent of the Atonement," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:565 (January-March 1985):52-63.

⁹⁰Alford, 4:402.

⁹¹Moo, p. 154.

departed from the truth they previously embraced, they too brought sudden spiritual ruin on themselves. This ruin would come upon them at Jesus Christ's judgment seat (2 Cor. 5:10), if not sooner.

"Ironically, the false teachers incur judgment by teaching that there will be no future judgment and thereby leading themselves and others into immorality."⁹²

". . . 'destruction' for leading others to 'destruction' is inevitable."⁹³

"False teachers are better known for what they deny than for what they affirm."⁹⁴

2:2 Reckless and hardened immorality ("sensuality") would accompany their doctrinal error.

"Clearly they permitted and defended immorality in a very broad sense."⁹⁵

When people abandon God's standard of "truth," they usually adopt a lower standard of morality. Since "sensuality" appeals to the flesh, many people follow the example of heretics, believing that they are correct in doing so—based on the rationalizations of their teachers.

"No doctrine, however senseless and monstrous, which under the guise of a religious faith ministers to the sensual appetites of men, will ever want followers."⁹⁶

This type of "religion" brings great dishonor on the church ("the way of truth will be maligned"), because unbelievers identify the immoral as professing Christians, judge their behavior as hypocritical, and then conclude the church is full of hypocrites.

2:3 False teachers, "in their greed," typically desire to satisfy themselves rather than God. This leads them to take advantage of their audiences ("exploit you with false words").

". . . Peter pointed out that the false teachers used 'feigned words.' The Greek word is *plastos*, from which we get our English word *plastic*. Plastic words! Words that can be

⁹²Bauckham, p. 241.

⁹³Moo, p. 93.

⁹⁴Wiersbe, 2:447.

⁹⁵Bigg, p. 273.

⁹⁶Lillie, p. 442.

twisted to mean anything you want them to mean! The false teachers use our vocabulary, but they do not use our dictionary. They talk about 'salvation,' 'inspiration,' and the great words of the Christian faith, but they do not mean what we mean. Immature and untaught believers hear these preachers or read their books and think that these men are sound in the faith, but they are not."⁹⁷

"There are also plastic preachers who can be molded and shaped by the people that they serve."⁹⁸

Peter personified their "judgment" and "destruction." His point was that God is *never* late or "asleep" in executing justice, though He is patient (cf. 3:9).

"We can argue that the danger of false teaching is greater in our day than it has ever been. Why? Because we live in an era that is deeply suspicious of absolute truth."⁹⁹

B. THE CONSEQUENCES OF FALSE TEACHING 2:4-10A

Peter next described the *consequences* that follow false teaching, in order to help his readers see the importance of avoiding it.

"Verses 4-10a form one long, complex conditional sentence; verses 4-8 form the conditional statement, and verses 9-10a the conclusion. This long sentence skillfully combines the different aspects involved in God's judicial dealings with mankind."¹⁰⁰

"Now Peter will give us three examples of apostates in the past. His first example is of the angels who sinned (v. 4), and it is an example of how the *Devil* works. His second example is that of the world of Noah's day (v. 5), and it is the example of the *world*. The third example (v. 6) is the turning of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, and that is the example of the *flesh*."¹⁰¹

2:4 We could translate the "ifs" in verses 4, 6, and 7 as "since." Each one is a first class condition in Greek. A first class condition assumes for the sake of the argument that what the writer wrote is true. In this case, each statement describes a situation that is indeed true to reality.

⁹⁷Wiersbe, 2:447.

⁹⁸McGee, 5:732.

⁹⁹Moo, p. 97.

¹⁰⁰Hiebert, *Second Peter* . . . , p. 95.

¹⁰¹McGee, 5:734.

"Angels" are in many respects superior to humans, yet God judged even some of them for sinning by consigning them to *tartaros* ("hell"). This is the only reference to "Tartarus" in the Bible. This term evidently originated in Greek mythology.¹⁰² This is probably the same angelic rebellion to which Jude referred (Jude 6). "Tartarus" is evidently a holding place "of darkness" and bondage.¹⁰³ Another view is that the reference to Tartarus is metaphorical, and indicates a limitation on the sphere of influence that God imposed on these angels who fell, rather than a literal place where they currently reside.¹⁰⁴ God will send these angels from Tartarus to the Lake of Fire, their terminal place of punishment, after He judges them finally (cf. Matt. 25:41). These angels appear to be those that rebelled with Satan. However, since they are in bondage now, they are evidently not the "demons" that assist Satan in his work on earth now. "Fetters" (Gr. *seirais*) has slightly better textual support than "pits" (Gr. *seirois*; cf. Jude 6). We should probably not equate these angels with the "sons of God" that Moses wrote about in Genesis 6:1-4.¹⁰⁵

"It is implied that fallen angels and unrighteous men alike undergo temporary punishment until the day of their final doom, cf. ver. 9."¹⁰⁶

2:5 Peter's second example was the sinners in Noah's day. God "did not spare" the sinners in the "ancient world" of Noah's day, either. Consequently there is no basis for supposing that He will spare any sinner in the world today. Both types of sinners (rebellious angels and men) are "ungodly." Peter called Noah a "herald (preacher) of righteousness" here (cf. 1 Pet. 3:19). By his words and deeds, Noah proclaimed righteousness to his ungodly neighbors. By referring to "seven others" whom God saved with Noah (i.e., his family members), Peter was probably hinting that he was the beginning of a new creation.

"The reason for this stress is perhaps to be found in the eschatological symbolism of the number eight, which represented an eighth day of new creation, following the seven days of the old creation's history (cf 2 *Enoch* 33:1-2; *Barn.* 15:9). Early Christians associated this symbolism with Sunday, the 'eighth day' (*Barn.* 15:9; Justin, *Dial.* 24.1: 41.4; 138.1). Sunday was the eighth day because it was the day of Christ's resurrection in which the new creation was begun . . .

¹⁰²Strachan, 5:135; Hiebert, *Second Peter* . . . , p. 97.

¹⁰³Gangel, p. 870.

¹⁰⁴Moo, pp. 102-3.

¹⁰⁵See my comments on 1 Peter 3:19-20.

¹⁰⁶Strachan, 5:135.

"Noah, preserved from the old world to be the beginning of the new world after the Flood, is a type of faithful Christians who will be preserved from the present world to inherit the new world after the judgment."¹⁰⁷

Many Bible students believe that the pattern of Noah's deliverance, *before the Flood*, prefigures the pretribulation Rapture of Christians. While it does, Peter did not make this comparison.

2:6 Peter's third example was the people of "Sodom and Gomorrah." God first demonstrated that He would judge ungodly sinners *with fire* when He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. The "ungodly" from then on ("thereafter") should not expect to escape the same fate. They, too, will be subject to fiery judgment. God delivered Lot and his family before He brought fiery judgment on his world (cf. the pretribulation rapture; 1 Thess. 5:9-10).

"Undoubtedly the author sees the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire as a pattern for the fiery judgment of the ungodly at the Parousia (3:7)."¹⁰⁸

"It has well been said that if God spares today's cities from judgment, He will have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah."¹⁰⁹

All three of Peter's examples (vv. 4-6) deal with unbelievers. These were the primary focus of Peter's warning. If there were some *believers* among the false teachers, Peter undoubtedly intended that they should take these warnings to heart—even though they would not suffer the same eternal judgment as unbelievers.

2:7-9 The reminder of "Lot" shows that God will not only punish the wicked, but will at the same time extricate the righteous ("rescue the godly") from the judgment He sends on the surrounding ungodly. This example, as well as the example of Noah (v. 5), assured Peter's faithful readers that God would not lose them in the mass of sinners whom He would judge. The destruction of Jerusalem was going to destroy the unbelieving Jews living there in A.D. 70.¹¹⁰ However, the primary warning deals with *eschatological* deliverance and punishment—at the return of Christ.¹¹¹ Another view is that the trials in view are all those challenges to faith that Christians experience in this world.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷Bauckham, p. 250.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 252.

¹⁰⁹Wiersbe, 2:451.

¹¹⁰See J. Dwight Pentecost, "The Apostles' Use of Jesus' Predictions of Judgment on Jerusalem in A.D. 70," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, p. 142.

¹¹¹Bauckham, p. 254.

¹¹²Moo, p. 106.

Of course, many righteous people have died *along with* the ungodly, in what have appeared to be God's judgments. One example of this is the faithful remnant in Israel who died in the wars that resulted in Israel's and Judah's captivities. Note that Peter said God is *able* ("knows how") to deliver the righteous. He did not say that He *would* do so in every case. This is still a basis for comfort, in that, if the will of God is such, the righteous will not suffer with the wicked. In the end, God will separate these two groups eternally, and *no* righteous person will suffer *eternal judgment* (cf. Matt. 13:30).

Had Peter not told us Lot was a "righteous" man, we might have concluded otherwise. Lot's righteousness strengthens Peter's illustration.

"'Righteous' is a relative term; and in this case we must look at Lot both in comparison with the defective morality of the age and also with the licentiousness of those with whom he is here contrasted. Moreover, in the midst of this corruption he preserves some of the brighter features of his purer nomad life."¹¹³

We cannot always tell who the righteous are, but God knows (cf. Matt. 13:24-30). How a person behaves may be misleading. Not only may some unbelievers appear to be saints, but some believers, such as Lot, appear to be unsaved. If every genuine believer gives evidence of his salvation by his good works, as some interpreters assert, then Lot was the exception to the rule. It seems more likely that Lot was what the New Testament calls a *carnal* believer.

"It is possible for a Christian to live close to sin, but he may barely escape with his life."¹¹⁴

2:10a Here is another indication that the false teachers Peter warned about *indulged* their fleshly passions (v. 2). To do so, they had to "despise [the] authority" of the apostles, the teaching of their Bibles, and God. However, Peter's reference to "authority" is probably a general one, indicating the principle of authority.¹¹⁵

"Those who subject themselves to the flesh cannot be subject to the Lord."¹¹⁶

¹¹³Alfred Plummer, "The Second Epistle General of Peter," in *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 8:453.

¹¹⁴Barbieri, p. 111.

¹¹⁵Moo, p. 108.

¹¹⁶Bauckham, p. 255. Cf. Matt. 6:24.

"False teaching and false behaviour ultimately always produce suffering and disaster, be it in Lot's day, in Peter's, or in our own."¹¹⁷

"The main idea in these verses comes across clearly: God judges those who obstinately disregard his commands while he protects those who stay faithful to him."¹¹⁸

C. THE CONDUCT OF FALSE TEACHERS 2:10B-19

Peter next emphasized the *conduct* of false teachers, in order to motivate his readers to turn away from them.

2:10b "Daring" means *bold* to the point of being presumptuous, and "self-willed" means *arrogant*.

"They are concerned about doing their own thing as opposed to doing God's will. Their theme song is 'I Did It My Way!'"¹¹⁹

"Angelic majesties" is literally "glories" (Gr. *doxas*), and probably refers to evil (fallen) angels. Another, less probable view, is that they describe (good) angels, who are more morally excellent than the false teachers.

2:11 This behavior of the false teachers is totally inappropriate, as is clear from the conduct of beings who are of a higher order than humans. Good "angels" do not slander ("bring a reviling judgment"; accuse) evil angels (the "angelic majesties" of verse 10) in the heavenly courts (cf. Jude 9).

"Let us imitate the angels. If we complain of wicked men, let it be to God, and that not with rage and reviling, but with compassion, that may evidence that we belong to him who is meek and merciful."¹²⁰

2:12 Rather than behaving as good angels do, the coming false teachers would act like "unreasoning animals." They would follow their lower "instincts," their "natural" desires, instead of their reasons. Animals live mainly by instinct. Peter therefore believed the false teachers deserved treatment similar to animals. The last clause involves a play on words in Greek. The idea is that they will perish like beasts, slaughtered animals, or "road-kill"

¹¹⁷Green, p. 100. See also James E. Allman, "Suffering in the Non-Pauline Epistles," in *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and Church*, pp. 198, 201, 204-5.

¹¹⁸Moo, p. 108. See also his helpful discussion of how and to what extent books that are not in the Bible influenced what the New Testament writers believed and wrote (pp. 108-13).

¹¹⁹Cedar, p. 222.

¹²⁰Henry, p. 1951.

as it were, like so much meat (cf. Jude 10). Peter did not mean they would escape eternal condemnation.

"As animals are trapped through their eagerness to satisfy their appetite, so self-indulgence betrays these men to their ruin."¹²¹

- 2:13 God will give them punishment in keeping with their crimes ("suffering wrong as the wages of doing wrong"; Rom. 6:23; Gal. 6:7). Rather than concealing their carousing under the cover of darkness, they shamelessly practice immorality in broad daylight ("count is a pleasure to revel in the daytime"). The pagans did this in their worship of false gods. Pagan worship often involved "sacred" prostitution. These practices were similar to "stains" on the clean fabric of the church, "blemishes" on its countenance (reputation), since the practitioners claimed to be Christians (cf. Eph. 5:27). The faithful Christians did not carouse. The false teachers did the carousing, but they did it as part of the Christian community. Peter could say they "reveled in their deceptions," since they extravagantly practiced immoral reveling while claiming to be followers of Christ.

"Like the blemishes on an animal not fit for sacrifice (Lev 1:3) or on a man not fit for priestly service (Lev 21:21), these immoral people were frustrating the church's aim of holiness and could make the church unfit to be presented as a sacrifice to God."¹²²

- 2:14 The person who has "eyes full of adultery" is one who thinks only of fornication when he or she sees members of the opposite sex (in today's world, not just the *opposite* sex, but whoever or whatever the object of lust happens to be; cf. Matt. 5:28). The false teachers sinned without restraint ("never cease from sin"). Furthermore, they lured people not firmly committed to Jesus Christ to join them ("enticing unstable souls"), as a fisherman lures his prey. Baxter considered Peter's use of the Greek word translated "enticing" here, and in verse 18: "a relic from Peter's fishing days."¹²³ The false teachers had considerable experience practicing ("hearts trained in") "greed," and were experts in it. They behaved like "children," undisciplined and self-centered, and were under God's judgment ("accursed").

- 2:15 The false prophet Balaam counseled Balak, the king of Moab, to invite the Israelites to participate with his people in a feast to honor Moab's gods (Num. 31:16). The best textual evidence suggests that Peter wrote, "Balaam the son of Bosor," Bosor being a play on the Hebrew word *basar*,

¹²¹W. H. Bennett, "The General Epistles, James, Peter, John, and Jude," in *The Century Bible: A Modern Commentary*, p. 274.

¹²²Bauckham, pp. 265-66.

¹²³Baxter, 6:312.

"flesh." Thus Peter indicated Balaam's immoral character by calling him the "son of flesh."¹²⁴ The Moabite worship included sacred prostitution (cf. Num. 25:1-3). Balaam is "the classic example of the false teacher who leads people astray for his own personal gain."¹²⁵

The false teachers Peter referred to were likewise trying to get the Christians to participate in idolatry and immoral practices. They, "forsaking the right way," urged the faithful to wander from the narrow path of righteousness back onto the broad way that leads to destruction ("have gone astray"; cf. Isa. 53:6; Rev. 2:14). Balaam's motive was greed ("loved the wages of unrighteousness"), i.e., "the earthly gain to be gotten by 'unrighteousness'"¹²⁶, as was the false teachers'. By advocating unrighteousness, they gained followers and profited personally.

2:16 Whenever a person rejects God's Word and His will, he or she begins to act irrationally, because God's Word reveals true reality. Finally, right becomes wrong, and wrong becomes right for him or her. That is what happened to Balaam. He became so insensitive that God had to use a dumb animal ("mute donkey") to "rebuke" him. The ancients regarded animals as mute (dumb) because they did not speak human language.¹²⁷ That "donkey," a proverbially obstinate animal, "restrained the prophet's madness," and was wiser than Balaam (cf. Jude 11).

"It is sufficient to say to one who believes at all in miracles, that it was no more difficult for God to utter thought through the mouth of the ass in the words of men, than to stop men, as he once did, from talking in a given language and cause them to talk in another."¹²⁸

2:17 Like the "springs" and "mists" that Peter described, the false teachers failed to deliver what they promised.

"Heterodoxy is all very novel in the classroom; it is extremely unsatisfying in the parish."¹²⁹

These teachers were hypocrites (cf. Jude 12). They would spend eternity in "the (black) darkness," that symbolizes separation from Him who is the Light (cf. Matt. 25:30; 1 John 1:6; Jude 13), because they turned from the light of God (1 John 1:5). Elsewhere, another figure of the final destiny of

¹²⁴Bauckham, pp. 267-68.

¹²⁵David H. Wheaton, "2 Peter," in *The New Bible Commentary, Revised*, p. 1256. Cf. McGee, 5:740; and Charles H. Savelle, "Canonical and Extra canonical Portraits of Balaam," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166:664 (October-December 2009):387-404.

¹²⁶Jamieson, et al., p. 1491. Italics omitted.

¹²⁷ Bauckham, p. 268.

¹²⁸Nathaniel M. Williams, "Commentary on the Epistles of Peter," in *An American Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 102.

¹²⁹Green, p. 114.

the lost is the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:14-15). Since fire also gives light, we should probably understand both figures—*darkness* and *fire*—to represent two aspects of eternal judgment, namely: separation from God and torment. The figures do not contradict each other if understood this way.

2:18 The false teachers appealed to their audiences with "arrogant," boastful (lit. "swollen") words, promising more than they could deliver, with vain words *empty* of anything to back them up. Their appeal was to "the lustful desires of sinful human nature" (NIV).

"Grandiose sophistry is the hook, filthy lust is the bait, with which these men catch those whom the Lord had delivered or was delivering."¹³⁰

Furthermore, they appealed to people who were "barely" escaping from those "who live in error." This group probably included new Christians, and or older carnal ones, who were still in the process of making a final break with their pagan past.¹³¹

"The average person does not know how to listen to and analyze the kind of propaganda that pours out of the mouths and printing presses of the apostates. Many people cannot tell the difference between a religious huckster and a sincere servant of Jesus Christ."¹³²

2:19 By "promising . . . freedom" from eschatological judgment to their hearers, while they themselves were the "slaves of corruption," the false teachers were ". . . like a 300-pound man selling diet books."¹³³ *Slavery*, after all, occurs whenever one is under the control of some influence, not just some other person.

"The false teachers reveal the futility of their promise of freedom from moral requirements by living lives enslaved to immorality themselves."¹³⁴

"Seneca [the Greek Stoic philosopher] said, 'To be enslaved to oneself is the heaviest of all servitudes.'"¹³⁵

"Just as a gifted musician finds freedom and fulfillment putting himself or herself under the discipline of a great

¹³⁰Bigg, p. 285.

¹³¹Kelly, p. 345; Hiebert, *Second Peter* . . . , p. 126.

¹³²Wiersbe, 2:458.

¹³³Gangel, p. 873.

¹³⁴Moo, p. 144.

¹³⁵William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, p. 396.

artist, or an athlete under the discipline of a great coach, so the believer finds true freedom and fulfillment under the authority of Jesus Christ."¹³⁶

D. THE CONDEMNATION OF FALSE TEACHERS 2:20-22

Next, Peter focused his discussion on the false teachers' final doom, in order to warn his readers of the serious results of following their instruction.

2:20 To whom does "they" refer? Some interpreters believe the antecedent is the new Christians that Peter mentioned at the end of verse 18.¹³⁷ Others think they are the unstable, unsaved people who were listening to the gospel.¹³⁸ Most commentators have concluded, however, that "they" are the false teachers who have been the main subject of Peter's warning throughout this chapter, and in the immediately preceding verses (vv. 18-19). What Peter said of them in verses 20-22 seems to bear this out.

"If the allusions in vv. 20-22 are to recent converts whom they lead astray, the description of hopelessness and ruin seems almost incredible. In the case of the teachers . . . such a description of utter ruin is entirely appropriate."¹³⁹

How could Peter say the false teachers had escaped the defilements of the world by the "full knowledge" (Gr. *epignosei*) of the "Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?" One answer is that they did not. In this view, Peter's "if" introduces a hypothetical possibility that is not true to reality. However, his other uses of "if" in this chapter (vv. 4, 6, and 7) all introduce situations that really took place. The situation he described in verse 20 seems to be a real situation, too.

Another answer is that Peter was referring to false teachers who were Christians.¹⁴⁰ Peter's other descriptions of the false teachers in this epistle, especially in chapter 2, seem to portray unbelievers primarily. It seems very unlikely that now, at the climax of his exhortation, he would focus on the few false teachers that might have been Christians.

I think it is more likely that the false teachers in view here, as in the rest of the chapter, were unsaved.¹⁴¹ They had evidently heard the gospel preached, and had fully understood the apostles' teaching that Jesus Christ

¹³⁶Wiersbe, 2:454.

¹³⁷E.g., Duane A. Dunham, "An Exegetical Study of 2 Peter 2:18-22," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140:557 (January-March 1983):40-54.

¹³⁸Gangel, p. 874.

¹³⁹Thomas, p. 273.

¹⁴⁰Alford, 4:411; *The Nelson . . .*, pp. 2134-35.

¹⁴¹Cf. Blum, p. 282.

was both Lord and Savior, but had rejected it. They had "escaped the defilements of the world," in the sense that they had understood the gospel, acceptance of which liberates the sinner. In other words, *the gospel* is the key to escape. Their escape was *possible* because they had heard the gospel. To illustrate, suppose I have the cure for cancer in a pill, and you have cancer. If I give you the pill, one could say that you have escaped your disease—even though you choose not to swallow the pill.

The false teachers had thrown their key to deliverance away, and had thereby become "entangled" and "overcome" *again* by the defilements of the world (cf. v. 19b). Their "first" state was eternal damnation without having heard the gospel, but their "last" state was "worse"—eternal damnation having rejected the gospel. Greater privilege results in greater responsibility, and greater punishment if one rejects the privilege (Matt. 12:45). Scripture teaches degrees of punishment as well as differences in rewards (cf. v. 21; Matt. 11:20-24; Luke 16:24; 2 Cor. 9:6; Gal. 6:7).

If *new* Christians are in view here, their earlier worldly life contrasts with their later worldly life under God's discipline. It is then their condition in this mortal life, and at the judgment seat of Christ, that is in view, not their eternal damnation.¹⁴²

Those who believe that loss of salvation is what Peter was talking about, in this verse and in verses 21 and 22, have to deal with an insuperable problem. The problem is that such an interpretation makes Scripture contradict Scripture (cf. John 3:16; 5:24; 10:28-29; et al.).

"This passage [2:20-22] is often quoted to prove the 'possibility of falling from grace, and from a very high degree of it too.' But it is one of the last passages in the Bible that should be addressed to prove that doctrine. The true point of this passage is to show that the persons referred to never were changed; that whatever external reformation might have occurred, their nature remained the same; and that when they apostatized from their outward profession, they merely acted out their nature, and showed in fact there had been no real change."¹⁴³

2:21 "Them" seems to continue to refer to unsaved false teachers. This verse amplifies the last statement in verse 20.

"It would [have been] better" for the false teachers, never to have gained full knowledge of God's commandment regarding holy behavior (the "way of righteousness"), than having gained it to reject it. Turning from the light

¹⁴²Dillow, p. 468.

¹⁴³Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*, p. 1454.

results in going into greater darkness (cf. Matt. 12:43-45). Even for a believer, more light brings more responsibility and consequently more severe judgment (cf. James 3:1).¹⁴⁴

"Ignorance can be a very bad thing, but disobedience is always worse."¹⁴⁵

2:22 Peter compared the false teachers to *unclean* dogs and swine (cf. Matt. 7:6; Prov. 26:11). Practice betrays nature. Dogs return to corruption that comes from within them: vomit. Pigs return to filth that they find outside themselves, even though their handlers may clean them up occasionally.¹⁴⁶ This second analogy may come from the old Syrian story of Ahikar.¹⁴⁷ The false teachers in view do both things.

"The sense is, not that the creature has washed itself clean in water (so apparently the R.V.), still less that it has been washed clean (as A.V.), and then returns to the mud; but that having once bathed in filth it never ceases to delight in it."¹⁴⁸

"Instead of being sheep, they were pigs and dogs . . ."¹⁴⁹

Peter's statement about the false teachers in this verse is his most derogatory of them, and it brings his warning to avoid these heretics to its climax.

"When easy-going kindness lounges in the place of righteous indignation, and allows Christ-dishonouring false doctrine to play havoc inside the Church, kindness has ceased to be Christian, it has become disguised disloyalty, camouflaged cowardice, or a moral wasting-disease."¹⁵⁰

Peter's primary concern was the characteristics, consequences, conduct, and condemnation of false teachers, not their condition (saved or unsaved). He could have said, "These teachers are unsaved." Most of the false teachers in view seem to be non-Christians, but Christians have become false teachers too (e.g., cultists). In reading chapter 2, I believe we should concentrate on what Peter stressed in evaluating the false teachers, rather than focusing mainly on their saved or lost status. Ask, "Is what he or she is saying contrary to Scripture?" rather than, "Is he or she unsaved?"

¹⁴⁴See Green, p. 120.

¹⁴⁵J. Nieboer, *Practical Exposition of 2 Peter Verse by Verse*, p. 193.

¹⁴⁶See McGee, 5:741-44, for his "parable of the prodigal pig."

¹⁴⁷*The Nelson . . .*, p. 2135.

¹⁴⁸Bigg, p. 287.

¹⁴⁹Wiersbe, 2:460.

¹⁵⁰Baxter, 6:312.

One writer argued that, "Gnosticism, in whatever stage or form, had little or nothing to do with these communities."¹⁵¹ However, another scholar wrote in his excellent commentary that he saw some Gnostic influence.¹⁵² Gnosticism exercised its major influence on Christianity in the second century.

V. THE PROSPECT FOR THE CHRISTIAN 3:1-16

Peter turned from a negative warning against false teachers, to making a positive declaration of the apostles' message, in order to help his readers understand why he wrote this letter. His language had been strong and confrontational, but now he spoke with love and encouragement in gentle and endearing terms.

"While in chapter 2 the writer delivered a fervid denunciation of the false teachers and their immorality, in this section he renews his pastoral concern to fortify his readers in regard to another aspect of the danger facing them, namely, the heretical denial of Christ's return."¹⁵³

"In the third chapter Peter refutes the mockers' denial of Christ's return (vv. 1-7), presents the correct view concerning Christ's return (vv. 8-13), and concludes with timely exhortations to his readers in view of the dark and dangerous days facing them (vv. 14-18)."¹⁵⁴

I like to think of the Book of 2 Peter as a bologna sandwich. Chapters 1 and 3 are the bread, the positive pastoral exhortations, and the middle chapter, 2, is the bologna (i.e., baloney) of the false teachers.

A. THE PURPOSE OF THIS EPISTLE 3:1-2

3:1 Peter's first letter was most likely "1 Peter." Of course, Peter may have written many epistles, so we cannot be sure that 1 Peter is in view.¹⁵⁵ The apostle implied that he wrote this present letter soon after the earlier one. This second epistle, he said, went to the same audience in northern Asia Minor (cf. 1 Pet. 1:1), primarily Gentile Christians. His purpose in writing the second letter was to refresh his readers' memories (cf. 1:13). "Sincere" means unflawed by evil. He gave his readers credit for not yet having embraced the teaching of the heretics.

"An effective antidote to false doctrine is to recall and dwell on the teaching already perceived."¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹Michael Desjardins, "The Portrayal of the Dissidents in 2 Peter and Jude: Does It Tell Us More About the 'Godly' Than the 'Ungodly'?" *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 30 (June 1987):95.

¹⁵²Kelly, pp. 338 and 349.

¹⁵³Hiebert, *Second Peter* . . . , p. 135.

¹⁵⁴Idem, "Directives for Living in Dangerous Days," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141:564 (October-December 1984):330-31.

¹⁵⁵Bigg, p. 289.

¹⁵⁶Andrew McNab, "The General Epistles of Peter," in *The New Bible Commentary*, p. 1149.

"The English 'sincere' is from the Latin words *sine cera*, 'without wax.' Some pottery salesmen would use wax to cover cracks and weak places in pottery. Such a cover-up could be detected only by holding the jug up to the sun to see if any weaknesses were visible. Such a vase was 'sun-judged' (the lit. meaning of the Gr. *eilikrines*). God wants His people to have sun-judged minds, not those in which their sin spots have been covered over."¹⁵⁷

- 3:2 Again Peter put the teaching ("commandment") of the "apostles," which these men received from Jesus Christ, on a level of authority *equal* with the writings of the Old Testament "prophets" (cf. 1:12-21; 3:16; Acts 1:16; Rom. 9:29; Heb. 4:7).

"The 'commandment' is used here in the same way as in 2:21 . . .: it emphasizes the ethical aspect of the Christian message because it is on this, along with the eschatological expectation, that the author wishes to insist, in opposition to the false teachers."¹⁵⁸

B. SCOFFING IN THE LAST DAYS 3:3-6

Peter warned his readers about the activity of *mockers* preceding the Lord's return, in order to enable them to deal with this test of their faith.

"Peter finally brings together two of the most important issues in the letter: the false teachers' skepticism about the return of Christ in glory (see 1:16-21) and their disdain for holiness (chap. 2)."¹⁵⁹

- 3:3 "First of all" means of primary importance (cf. 1:20). The "last days" Peter referred to here are the days before Jesus Christ's return. This is the same way other writers of Scripture used the phrase "last days" (cf. 2 Tim. 3:1-5; 1 John 2:18-19). What the "mockers" would be "mocking" follows in verse 4. Here the emphasis is on their attitude of intellectual superiority and disdain of scriptural revelation. This attitude led them to immoral conduct.

"The adversaries who denied the Parousia were themselves a proof of its imminence."¹⁶⁰

"A scoffer is someone who treats lightly that which ought to be taken seriously."¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷Gangel, p. 875.

¹⁵⁸Bauckham, p. 288.

¹⁵⁹Moo, p. 165.

¹⁶⁰T. Fornberg, *An Early Church in a Pluralistic Society: A Study of 2 Peter*, p. 61.

¹⁶¹Wiersbe, 2:463.

3:4 One could hardly find a better summary anywhere of the philosophy of naturalism, that so thoroughly permeates contemporary western civilization, than what this verse contains. Peter referred to a denial of supernaturalism and an assertion of uniformitarianism. In particular, the scoffers denied "the promise" of the Lord Jesus: that He would return (John 14:1-3; Acts 1:11; et al.). They assumed that God does not intervene in the world.

"Presumptuous skepticism and lawless lust, setting nature and its so-called laws above the God of nature and revelation, and arguing from the past continuity of nature's phenomena that there can be no future interruption to them, was the sin of the antediluvians, and shall be that of the scoffers in the last days."¹⁶²

"Those who give way to their own lusts will always mock at any incentive to noble living."¹⁶³

The "fathers" are probably physical forefathers, more likely the Old Testament patriarchs, rather than the first generation of Christians. This is the normal use of the word in the New Testament.

Peter proceeded to answer the second statement in this verse, in verses 5-7, and then responded to the first statement of verse 4, the scoffers' rhetorical question, in verses 8-10. So this section has a somewhat chiasmic structure.

3:5 "Escapes their notice" in the Greek means forgets purposely by disregarding information. Peter cited two events in the creation of the cosmos that show things have not always been as they are. God *did* intervene in the world in the past. When God spoke ("by the word of God"), the universe came into existence ("the heavens existed"; Gen. 1:6-8; cf. Heb. 11:3). God spoke again, and the dry land separated from ("out of") the waters (Gen. 1:9-10). Thus God used *water* to *form the dry land* ("earth was formed out of water and by water"). God brought the whole universe into existence by His "word" and "by water." Peter proceeded to say that He also used both means to destroy it (in Noah's day, v. 6), and He will use two means to destroy it in the future, His word and fire (v. 7).

"St. Peter says nothing that a simple Jew could not have gathered from his own reading of Genesis."¹⁶⁴

¹⁶²Jamieson, et al., p. 1492.

¹⁶³Wheaton, p. 1257.

¹⁶⁴Bigg, p. 293.

3:6 The flood in Noah's day was Peter's third example. God spoke again, and the earth ("world") "flooded." "Through which" (a plural relative pronoun in Greek) probably refers to "the Word of God" and "water" (v. 5).

". . . the author apparently takes the account of the Flood to imply a complete destruction of the created world by water [as opposed to a local flood or to the destruction of human beings only]."¹⁶⁵

". . . in 3:6 his [Peter's] emphasis is on the Flood as a universal judgment on sinful men and women. But he evidently conceives this judgment as having been executed by means of a cosmic catastrophe which affected the heavens as well as the earth."¹⁶⁶

This catastrophe involved the opening up of the heavens to deluge the earth with rain (Gen. 7:11-12). Peter spoke of world history in three periods divided by two cataclysms: the world before the Flood (v. 6), the present world (v. 7), and the future world (v. 13).

C. END-TIME EVENTS 3:7-10

Next, Peter outlined what will surely happen, so his readers would understand what will take place.

3:7 God has given orders that the present heavens and earth (vv. 5-6) will experience another "judgment" yet future. Then God will, with His word, destroy them by "fire" rather than by water (cf. vv. 10, 12). This will evidently take place after the Great White Throne judgment, and before the creation of the new heavens and new earth (cf. Rev. 20:11-15; 21:1).¹⁶⁷ The world is presently "reserved" for fire, in the sense that this is its inevitable destiny (cf. Deut. 32:22; Isa. 34:4 LXX; 66:15-16; Zeph. 1:18; Mal. 4:1).

3:8 Again Peter reminded his readers to remember what they had learned previously (v. 1), and not to forget ("do not let this . . . escape your notice"), as the scoffers did (v. 5). As far as God's faithfulness to His promises, it does not matter if He gave His promise yesterday or a thousand years ago. He will still remain faithful, and will fulfill every promise (cf. Ps. 90:4). The passage of a thousand years should not lead us to conclude that God will not fulfill what He has promised. The passing of time does not cause God to forget His promises.

¹⁶⁵Sidebottom, p. 120.

¹⁶⁶Bauckham, p. 299.

¹⁶⁷See Gangel, p. 876.

"... to a man of countless riches, a thousand dollars are as a single penny."¹⁶⁸

Peter was not saying that the "day of judgment" will last 1,000 years, in saying "a day is as 1,000 years" *with the Lord*. This would contribute nothing to Peter's argument against the scoffers.

This verse does not mean that God operates in a timeless state. Time is simply the way He and we measure the relationship of events to one another. The idea of a timeless existence is Platonic, not biblical. God's relationship to time is different from ours, since He is *eternal*, but this does not mean that eternity will be "timeless." *Eternity* is endless passing of time.

"Peter did not say that to God 'one day *is* a thousand years, and a thousand years *are* one day.' The point is not that time has no meaning for God but rather that His use of time is such that we cannot confine Him to our time schedules. His use of time is extensive, so that He may use a thousand years to do what we might feel should be done in a day, as well as intensive, doing in a day what we might feel could only be done in a thousand years."¹⁶⁹

This statement does not negate the hope of the imminent return of the Lord, either. Peter, like the other New Testament writers, spoke as though his readers would be alive at His return (1:19; 3:14). This was an indisputable hope of the early Christians.¹⁷⁰

3:9 The fact that the fulfillment of the Lord Jesus' promise to return for His own (John 14:2-3) seems to linger, does not mean that God has forgotten His promise, was lying, or cannot fulfill it. "The Lord" seems to be a reference to Jesus Christ (cf. 3:15). "Is patient toward you" means that He is waiting to fulfill it, so people will have time to repent. Unbelievers left on the earth will be able to repent after the Rapture, but it is better for them if they do so before that event. Multitudes will be saved during the seven-year Tribulation (Rev. 7:14), though it will be harder for them to be saved *then* than it is *now* (2 Thess. 2:11).

"In Greek the notion of repentance is of a change of outlook, in Hebrew thought a turning round and adopting a new way of life. The two are not incompatible."¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸Jamieson, et al., p. 1493.

¹⁶⁹Hiebert, *Second Peter* . . . , p. 153. See also Bauckham, p. 310. See Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistles of John*, pp. 106-7, for a good explanation of how Einstein's special theory of relativity has introduced a new perspective on time that harmonizes with this verse.

¹⁷⁰Fornberg, p. 68; Bauckham, p. 310.

¹⁷¹Sidebottom, p. 122.

If God *wants* everyone to be saved, will not all be saved?¹⁷² The answer is no, because this desire of God's is not as strong as some others of His desires. For example, we know that God desires that everyone have enough freedom to believe or disbelieve the gospel—more strongly—than He desires that everyone be saved. Otherwise, everyone *would* end up believing. However, that will not happen (v. 7; Matt. 25:46). Somehow, it will result in God's greater glory for some to "perish," than for "all" to be saved ("come to repentance"). Nevertheless, God sincerely "desires" (Gr. *boulomenos* in contrast to the stronger *thelontes*, "determines") that every person come to salvation.¹⁷³ It is more important to God, that people be free moral agents—and choose to accept or reject His grace—than that everyone accept it without the ability to make a choice. God is so sovereign and in control, that His ultimate will still gets accomplished—even though He gives humans the ability to make choices. Our freedom is *real*, but limited. We can choose some things but not others (e.g., to fly like birds).¹⁷⁴

"Three aspects of the will of God may be observed in Scripture: (1) the sovereign will of God (Isa. 46:9-11; Dan. 4:17, 35; Heb. 2:4; Rev. 17:17); (2) the moral will of God, i.e. His moral law (Mk. 3:35; Eph. 6:6; Heb. 13:21); and (3) the desires of God coming from His heart of love (Ezek. 33:11; Mt. 23:37; 2 Pet. 3:9). The sovereign will of God is certain of complete fulfillment, but the moral law is disobeyed by men, and the desires of God are fulfilled only to the extent that they are included in His sovereign will. God does not desire that any should perish, but it is clear that many will not be saved (Rev. 21:8)."¹⁷⁵

"No dispensationalist minimizes the importance of God's saving purpose in the world. But whether it is God's total purpose or even His principal purpose is open to question. The dispensationalist sees a broader purpose in God's program for the world than salvation, and that purpose is His own glory [Eph. 1:6, 12, 14]. For the dispensationalist the glory of God is the governing principle and overall purpose, and the soteriological program is one of the principal means employed in bringing to pass the greatest demonstration of His own glory. Salvation is part and parcel of God's program, but it cannot be equated with the entire purpose itself."¹⁷⁶

¹⁷²See Ramesh P. Richard, "Soteriological Inclusivism and Dispensationalism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:601 (January-March 1994):85-108.

¹⁷³See my discussion of God's priorities in "What Prayer Will and Will Not Change," in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, pp. 107-11.

¹⁷⁴For Calvin's explanations of this and other similar verses, see 3:24:15-17.

¹⁷⁵*The New Scofield Reference Bible*, pp. 1340-41.

¹⁷⁶Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, p. 102. The same statement appears in idem, *Dispensationalism*, p. 93. See pp. 46-47 and 102-5 in *Dispensationalism Today*, or pp. 40-41 and 93-95 in

"Soteriology . . . is obviously a major theme of biblical theology, though it clearly is not *the* central motif. This is evident in that salvation implies deliverance *from* something *to* something and is thus a functional rather than a teleological concept. In other words, salvation leads to a purpose that has been frustrated or interrupted and is not a purpose in itself."¹⁷⁷

"The final cause of all God's purposes is his own glory. . . . (Rev. iv. 11) . . . (Num. xiv. 21) . . . (Is. xlviii. 11) . . . (Ezek. xx. 9) . . . (1 Cor. i. 26-31; Eph. ii. 8-10)."¹⁷⁸

"The final end of both election and reprobation is the Divine glory, in the manifestation of certain attributes. . . . Neither salvation nor damnation are ultimate ends, but means to an ultimate end: namely, the manifested glory of the triune God. . . . 2 Cor. 3:7, 9."¹⁷⁹

What Peter wrote about God "not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance," applies to the unsaved and the saved alike.

3:10 The phrase "day of the Lord" refers to a specific time yet future, as elsewhere in Scripture. This "day" will begin when Antichrist makes a covenant with Israel, and it will conclude with the burning up of the present heavens and earth (Dan. 9:27; 2 Pet. 3:12; et al.). Some ancient manuscripts read "the earth and its works will be laid bare [Gr. *eurethesetai*]." This could mean that the earth and its works will be exposed for what they really are. "Its works" probably refers to all that has been done on earth that has only temporal value (e.g., buildings, etc.). This day will come "like a thief," in that its beginning will take those unbelievers, living on the earth then (after the Rapture), by surprise (Matt. 24:37-39, 43-44; Luke 12:39-40; 1 Thess. 5:2; Rev. 3:3; 16:15).

The term "heavens" probably refers to both the earth's atmosphere ("first heaven") and the "second heaven," the physical universe in which the stars and other planetary bodies exist—but not to God's abode (the "third heaven"). The "elements" (Gr. *stoicheia*) apparently refer to the material building blocks of physical things (i.e., the atoms, molecules, and larger masses that are foundational to still larger things). Other views are that they are the heavenly bodies or the angelic powers.

Dispensationalism, for a full discussion of God's ultimate purpose being doxological rather than soteriological.

¹⁷⁷Eugene H. Merrill, "A Theology of the Pentateuch," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, pp. 21-22.

¹⁷⁸Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:535-36.

¹⁷⁹William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 1:448.

After the Flood, God told Noah, "I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease" (Gen. 8:21c-22). He meant that He would not do so with another flood. He went on to say, "All flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth" (Gen. 9:11b; cf. v. 15). Peter's announcement of a worldwide judgment by fire does not, therefore, contradict God's promise in the Noahic Covenant.

When in the "day of the Lord" will this conflagration take place? Some believe it will happen at the beginning of the millennial kingdom.¹⁸⁰ Of these, some believe this destruction will be only a limited renovation of the earth, as the Flood was.¹⁸¹ It seems to others, however, that this holocaust will take place at the end of the Millennium. To some who hold this view, this judgment will result in the renovation of the earth, but to others who hold this view, it will result in the destruction of the universe as we know it—since the heavens, as well as the earth, will be changed *then* (Rev. 21:1; cf. Matt. 5:18; 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 16:17; 21:33).¹⁸²

"Peter clearly opposes those Christians who insisted that Christ had to return within a certain short period of time after his resurrection. But he by no means opposes the idea of imminence itself."¹⁸³

"Only the book of Revelation in the New Testament speaks so directly about the cosmic effects of the day of the Lord."¹⁸⁴

D. LIVING IN VIEW OF THE FUTURE 3:11-16

Peter drew the application for his readers, and focused their attention on how they should live presently, in view of the future.

3:11 Peter believed that an understanding of the future should motivate the believer to live a holy life now. His question is rhetorical. "Holy conduct" refers to behavior that is separate from sin, and set apart from the world, in

¹⁸⁰E.g., George N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 2:504-9.

¹⁸¹E.g., Alford, 4:418; Robert D. Culver, *Daniel and the Latter Days*, p. 188; and Walter Scott, *Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 418.

¹⁸²For answers to the arguments of Peters and Culver, see R. Larry Overstreet, "A Study of 2 Peter 3:10-13," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137:548 (October-December 1980):358-68.

¹⁸³Moo, p. 189. See also Michael J. Svingel, "Extreme Makeover: Heaven and Earth Edition—Will God Annihilate the World and Re-create It *Ex Nihilo*?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 171:684 (October-December 2014):401-17; and Glenn R. Kreider, "The Flood Is as Bad as It Gets: Never Again Will God Destroy the Earth," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 171:684 (October-December 2014):418-39; for arguments favoring renovation, rather than re-creation.

¹⁸⁴Carson and Moo, p. 666.

order to please God. Godly ("godliness") means like God (1:3, 6-7; cf. 2:7, 10, 12-15, 18-20; 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:15-16).

3:12 The Greek participle translated "hastening" or "speeding" (*speudontes*) sometimes means, "desiring earnestly" (RSV margin).¹⁸⁵ If Peter meant that here, the sense would be that believers not only are "looking" for the "day of God," but also *desire earnestly* to see it (cf. vv. 8-10; Matt. 24:42; 25:13).¹⁸⁶ The AV has "hastening unto," implying that Peter meant believers are *rapidly approaching* the "day of God." Yet "unto" needs supplying; it is not in the text. Most of the translators and commentators, however, took *speudontes* in its usual sense of hastening. They assumed that Peter was thinking that believers can hasten the day of God by their prayers (cf. Matt. 6:10) and their preaching (cf. Matt. 24:14; Acts 3:19-20).¹⁸⁷ Believers, according to this view, influence God's timetable by their witnessing and their praying, and as they bring people to Christ (cf. Josh. 10:12-14; 2 Kings 20:1-6; et al.).¹⁸⁸

"Clearly this idea of hastening the End is the corollary of the explanation (v 9) that God defers the Parousia because he desires Christians to repent. Their repentance and holy living may therefore, from the human standpoint, hasten its coming. This does not detract from God's sovereignty in determining the time of the End . . . , but means only that his sovereign determination graciously takes human affairs into account."¹⁸⁹

The "day of God" may be a reference to the time, yet future, in which God will be "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28).¹⁹⁰ This will follow the creation of the new heavens and new earth (Rev. 21:1). On the other hand, this phrase may be another way of describing "the day of the Lord."¹⁹¹ The "day of God" in Revelation 16:14 refers to the time of the battle of Armageddon, which will be at the end of the Tribulation. Consequently, I lean toward taking "the day of God" as another way of referring to "the day of the Lord." The antecedent of "on account of which" (NASB) is "the day of God." God will *burn up* the present "heavens" and earth ("elements") because of *that* "day" (i.e., because the day of the Lord has reached its end).

¹⁸⁵A *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. "speudo."

¹⁸⁶Lenski, p. 348; Barbieri, p. 122.

¹⁸⁷Jamieson, et al., p. 1493; Bigg, p. 298; Green, p. 140; Barclay, pp. 410-11; Kelly, p. 367; Blum, p. 287; Sidebottom, p. 123-24.

¹⁸⁸Cf. Constable, pp. 101-6.

¹⁸⁹Bauckham, p. 325.

¹⁹⁰Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept from the Hour*, p. 73; et al.

¹⁹¹Fanning, p. 470.

3:13 We "are looking forward to (for)" the "new heavens" and the "new earth," not the *destruction* of the *present* heavens and earth. The reason is that the new heavens and earth will be where "righteousness dwells." Unrighteousness characterizes the present world (cf. Jer. 23:5-7; 33:16; Dan. 9:24; Rev. 21:1, 8, 27). "His promise" of the new heavens and new earth is in Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; et al.

"Christians need to remember the ultimate, 'bottom-line,' purpose of biblical eschatology: to make us better Christians here and now."¹⁹²

"The purpose of prophetic truth is not speculation but motivation . . ."¹⁹³

3:14 "These things" probably refers to all of what Peter just finished saying in verses 10-13, rather than to the new world in which righteousness dwells (v. 13; cf. the "these things" in v. 11). Peter again urged his readers to "diligent" action (cf. 1:5, 10). He wanted us to be *at peace with God* ("found by Him in peace"), and the implication is that he expected his readers to be *alive* when the Lord comes.¹⁹⁴ "Spotless" means without defect or defilement (as in a spotless sacrifice, cf. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:19), and "blameless" means without justifiable cause for reproach, without offense. The false teachers were stains and blemishes (2:13), but believers need to be spotless and blameless.

3:15 We should view the Lord's tarrying as a manifestation of His longsuffering ("patience"), that leads people to repentance and "salvation," rather than as an indication that He is never coming (v. 9).

"While God is waiting, He is both giving time for the unbeliever to be saved, and for the believer to be working out his salvation (cf. Phil. 2:12, 13) in terms of progress in sanctification."¹⁹⁵

Peter regarded Paul as a "dear brother," who was united with him in his allegiance to God and His Word. Perhaps Peter had Romans 2:4 in mind, when he said that "Paul . . . wrote" the same thing he had just said.

3:16 "These things" probably refers generally to future events (cf. vv. 11, 14), and the importance of Christians living godly lives in view of them (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:51-58; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 2 Thess. 2:1-12).

¹⁹²Moo, p. 202.

¹⁹³Wiersbe, 2:466.

¹⁹⁴Bauckham, p. 327.

¹⁹⁵Wheaton, p. 1258.

"It is not only possible, but probable, that St. Peter received every one of St. Paul's Epistles within a month or two of its publication. We cannot imagine that one apostle should have remained in ignorance of what other apostles were doing, and it is quite inconceivable that St. Peter should not have read Galatians and I Corinthians."¹⁹⁶

If Peter wrote this epistle in A.D. 67 or 68, it is possible that he could have read every one of Paul's 13 inspired epistles. It is somewhat comforting to learn that even the Apostle Peter found some of what Paul wrote "hard to understand"! Peter also wrote some things in his two epistles that tax our understanding. The "untaught" (Gr. *amatheis*) are those who had not received teaching concerning all that God had revealed. The "unstable" (Gr. *asteriktoi*) are those who were not always consistent in their allegiance to God or the world, namely, double-minded, fence-straddling compromisers. These types of people misunderstood and, in some cases, deliberately misrepresented the meaning of Paul's writings. However, this only added to their own guilt before God.

"The verb 'distort' (*streblousin*), occurring only here in the New Testament, means 'to twist or wrench,' specifically, 'to stretch on the rack, to torture' [James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources*, p. 593]. They take Paul's statements and twist and torture them, like victims on the rack, to force them to say what they want them to say."¹⁹⁷

Note that Peter regarded Paul's writings as having equal authority with the Old Testament Scriptures. This statement, "[Paul's] letters . . . as they do also the rest of the Scriptures," reiterates what Peter wrote previously about the apostles' teaching being equal with the (Old Testament) prophets' writings (1:12-21; 3:2).

"That an Apostle should speak of the writings of a brother-Apostle in the same *terms* as the books of the Old Testament—viz., as *Scripture*—need not surprise us, especially when we remember the large claims made by St. Paul for his own words (1 Thess. ii. 13; 2 Thess. ii. 15; Eph. iii. 3-5. Comp. Acts xv. 28; Rev. xxii. 18, 19)."¹⁹⁸

"In attempting to destroy the Bible men destroy themselves."¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶Bigg, pp. 300-1.

¹⁹⁷Hiebert, "Directives for . . .," p. 335.

¹⁹⁸Plummer, 8:462.

¹⁹⁹Williams, p. 111.

VI. CONCLUSION 3:17-18

Peter concluded his epistle with a summary of what he had said, and a doxology. He did so to condense his teaching for his readers, and to redirect their living to glorify God again.

3:17 Much of what Peter had written was *warning*—that he summarized here. His appeal was tender throughout this epistle (cf. vv. 1, 8, 14). The threat to his readers was the false teachers (ch. 2). Peter's mental picture was of a *torrent* of false teaching, knocking believers off their feet and sweeping them away. The possibility of loss of salvation is not in view, but loss of steadfastness is.

". . . it is a remarkable coincidence, that St. Peter, well acquainted as he was with St. Paul's wirings, should have written this word [*sunapechthe*, "being carried away"] which is the very one used by that Apostle (ref. Gal. [2:13]) of Barnabas, at Antioch, when he *sunapechthe* ["was carried away"] with the hypocrisy of Peter and the other Jews . . ."200

This is the fourth and last time Peter addressed his readers as "beloved" in this chapter, and in each instance he gave them a challenge. He told them to remember (vv. 1-2), to be informed (v. 8), to be diligent (v. 14), and to beware ("be on your guard," v. 17).

3:18 Next and finally, he added a positive exhortation (cf. 1:5-10). Rather than being swept away by error, his audience should keep on growing (present imperative in Greek) in God's "grace." They could do so by consciously depending on His resources (His power and promises, 1:3-4), and by growing in the "knowledge" (Gr. *gnosei*) of "our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (cf. 1:11; 2:20; 3:2). They could do the latter by getting more intimately acquainted with Him day by day (1:5-8).

"Christian knowledge fosters fellowship with God and deepens a consciousness of the believer's obligation to live a life worthy of His grace."²⁰¹

"The command to grow is an appeal to the will. But growth, in the spiritual as in the physical realm, is not produced by an assertion of the will. Yet the human will plays a decisive part in the experience of spiritual growth. Believers must will to remove the hindrances to growth while actively fostering the conditions which promote

²⁰⁰Alford, 4:420.

²⁰¹Hiebert, *Second Peter* . . . , p. 178.

growth. When the conditions for spiritual growth are maintained the divinely implanted life will assuredly grow and mature. . . .

"Growing knowledge fosters fellowship with God and deepens the consciousness of one's obligations to lead a life worthy of His grace."²⁰²

Continuing growth ". . . is the unfailing panacea for all spiritual ills."²⁰³

"We grow best in a loving family, and this is where the local church comes in. A baby needs a family for protection, provision, and affection. Tests prove that babies who are raised alone, without special love, tend to develop physical and emotional problems very early. The church is God's 'nursery' for the care and feeding of Christians, the God-ordained environment that encourages them to grow."²⁰⁴

We grow as we utilize the "means of grace," namely: things that channel God's grace (help) to us, such as reading the Bible, praying, meeting with other believers for fellowship and mutual encouragement, and obeying God.

The greatest goal for the Christian should be to glorify Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 10:31). Only four epistles end with a doxology, including this one (cf. Rom. 16:25-27; Phil. 4:20; Jude 24-25). Normally doxologies glorify *God*, but this one, and two others, glorify *Jesus Christ* ("to Him be the glory"; cf. 2 Tim. 4:18; Rev. 1:5-6). Peter's final words focused his readers' attention anew on the ultimate priority of glorifying Christ. The "day of eternity" is the time when we will be living on the new earth (v. 13).²⁰⁵

²⁰²Idem, "Directives for . . .," p. 338.

²⁰³H. A. Ironside, *Expository Notes on the Epistles of Peter*, p. 102.

²⁰⁴Wiersbe, 2:471.

²⁰⁵See also Craig A. Blasing, "The Day of the Lord Will Come: An Exposition of 2 Peter 3:1-18," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 169:676 (October-December 2012):387-401.

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