

CONQUERING THROUGH CONFLICT

A Study of 2 Peter

STUDY ONE

A Letter That Rattles Our Cage

Selections from 2 Peter

Second Peter is designed to rattle our cage, to stir up our soul, to keep us on the cutting edge of reality, and to spur us into action.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

SOME letters that arrive in the mail get our attention more than others. “Urgent! Immediate action required!” stamped on the envelope prompts us to tear open the letter right away—only to find a slick advertising flyer inside! Nothing really important, so in the trash it goes.

Second Peter is emblazoned with urgent calls to action, but it’s no empty marketing tool. This to-the-point letter delivers messages of vital importance, and we dare not toss it aside.

Peter stated his goal bluntly: “to stir you up” (2 Peter 1:13 NASB). He designed his letter to rattle some cages in the hopes that it would spur his readers to wake up and be *diligent* in their walk with Christ.

Why was Peter so urgent? Because false teachers had infiltrated the churches and were undermining the faith. Also, the Lord had shown Peter that his life’s clock was ticking its final hour, and Peter had more to say and not much time to say it. “The stakes are so high,” wrote Peter, and “I am especially eager that you have all this down in black and white so that after I die, you’ll have it for ready reference” (1:12, 15 MSG).

In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we’ll overview 2 Peter and map the territory. Adventures await in this intriguing letter, so let’s pray and get started.



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A Letter That Rattles Our Cage

Selections from 2 Peter



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Ask for the Holy Spirit's insight as you open God's Word.

Father, speak to me through the passage of Scripture I study today. With the help of the Holy Spirit, illuminate the truths it contains. I open my ears to hear Your instructions. I open my eyes to see Your hand at work in my life. Lead me in Your path. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read [2 Peter](#) in the New Living Translation from beginning to end, all sixty-one verses. Note Peter's emphasis on Christian virtues, his warnings against false teachers, and his fascinating discussion of end times. What verse stands out to you as most encouraging?

Although 1 and 2 Peter were written by Peter, the letters bear some differences. First, *Peter's second letter is more difficult to interpret than his first*. Discussing hope amid suffering in 1 Peter, Peter just briefly mentioned "the day when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1 Peter 1:7). In 2 Peter, however, Peter whisks his readers on a journey into the future, which requires us to dig deeper to understand the complex subject of end times.

Second, *Peter's concern in 2 Peter is different than in 1 Peter*. Peter's first letter focuses on external persecution from a culture bent on crushing Christianity. Second Peter shifts to internal corruption from false teachers—a far more insidious danger.

Let's look closer at Peter's themes in 2 Peter, but first a word about the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study.



A Letter That Rattles Our Cage
Selections from 2 Peter



Searching the Scriptures Method and Resources

Observation is the foundational phase in *Searching the Scriptures*, on which we build *interpretation* (the meaning of the passage) and *correlation* (the meaning enhanced by other passages). Finally comes *application*, putting the Scriptures into practice. For helpful instruction on *Searching the Scriptures*, consult the Insight for Living Ministries web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).” There, you can also follow the [link to purchase a copy](#) of Pastor Chuck’s book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*.



Observation: Peter’s Themes

The themes in 2 Peter fit together like the feathers, shaft, and point of an arrow aimed straight at the reader’s heart. Three subjects comprise the feathers: warnings, reminders, and promises. Read the verses below and write down your observations on how the verses illustrate the subjects.

Warnings	Reminders	Promises
1:4	1:12–13	1:10
2:1–3	2:21–22	2:9
3:14	3:1–2	3:13



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These “feathers” amount to nothing more than spiritual fluff if we don’t act on them. So, the main shaft of the arrow is *diligence*. What did Peter say about this theme in [2 Peter 1:10](#) and [3:14](#)?

Finally, when we diligently apply Peter’s warnings, reminders, and promises, the resulting outcome is the tip of the arrow: *hope*. What “hope” forms the central point in [1:11](#); [2:9](#); and [3:9](#)?

This diagram illustrates how these themes fit together.



Shift your mind into gear. With diligence, carry out the game plan God set forth in 2 Peter, and the point of the arrow will follow: hope. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A Letter That Rattles Our Cage
Selections from 2 Peter



Interpretation: Mapping 2 Peter

A chart is a handy tool to aid interpretation. Read through this chart thoughtfully, and then answer the following questions.

SECOND PETER

Introduction (1:1–2)	Exhortation to Spiritual Maturity Answers question: How can I grow in grace and knowledge? (1:2–3)	Denunciation of False Teachers Answers question: What should I expect from so-called prophets?	Anticipation of Christ's Return Answers question: What sort of people ought we to be? (3:11)	Conclusion (3:17–18)
	CHAPTER 1	CHAPTER 2	CHAPTER 3	
Warning	Be pure! (1:4)	Be aware! (2:1–3)	Be diligent! (3:1–14)	
Reminder	1:12–13	2:21–22	3:1–2	
Promise	"You will never stumble." (1:10)	"The Lord knows how to rescue." (2:9)	"We are looking for new heavens and a new earth." (3:13)	
Perspective	Looking within	Looking back	Looking ahead	
Theme	Spiritual maturity as a remedy for false teaching and a right response in light of Christ's second coming			
Key Verses	3:17–18			
Christ in 2 Peter	Jesus is the Morning Star, who rescues the righteous from temptation and reserves the wicked for judgment (1:19; 2:9).			

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Peter wrote 2 Peter shortly before his death by crucifixion in AD 67, during Nero's reign of terror in Rome. Early church tradition states that Peter requested to be crucified upside down so as not to suffer in the same manner as his Lord.



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Selections from 2 Peter

The principles in 2 Peter weren't just theories for Peter; he lived them. Hope of "the new heavens and the new earth" and "a world filled with God's righteousness" kept Peter faithful through his sufferings and brutal martyrdom (2 Peter 3:13).

Based on what you glean from the chart, what would you say is the purpose of 2 Peter?

Key terms in 2 Peter include *knowledge* (1:2–3, 8; 2:20–21), *corruption* (2:19), and *diligence* ("make every effort" 3:14). What do these terms mean, and how are they connected in Peter's argument?

Every time you read Peter's letters, remember this was the man who denied knowing Christ while the Savior was under arrest. The man who failed was also forgiven fully, and he became the pillar of the early church. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Dangers of False Teachers

With the apostles aging, rogue teachers were already moving in, spreading false doctrine and moral compromise in the churches. Although Peter's writing may seem surprising and strange to us, his early readers heard the old apostle's warnings loud and clear: beware of the charlatans, stick with the Scriptures and the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, keep hoping in Christ's return, and maintain holy lives until He returns.



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Later, Jude, one of Jesus' half-brothers, issued similar red alerts in his brief letter to the churches. What warning did Jude give in [Jude 1:3–4](#)?

Possibly referring to 2 Peter, Jude urged his readers to “remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ predicted” (1:17). What dangers did the apostles (including Peter) anticipate, according to [1:18–19](#)?

Don't underestimate the threat to the early church these false teachers posed with their flagrant lifestyles and self-serving heresies. Indeed, we must continue to guard against them even today.

What are the characteristics of false teachers? They are more interested in gaining popularity than declaring the truth, in receiving than in giving. They model seduction toward evil rather than attraction toward good, and they lead people from God, not to God.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Application: The HOPE-filled Life

Peter breathed his final words hoping in Christ and urging those he loved to do the same. As we conclude, let's summarize the message of 2 Peter with an acrostic—*HOPE*.

H—Heed what you already know (2 Peter 1:12–13; 3:1–2). Peter reminded his readers of the principles he had taught because they weren't practicing them. Don't simply store up knowledge; live what you know.

O—Open your eyes and ears (2:1–3; 3:17). Don't confuse a teacher's charisma with orthodoxy. Compare what you hear with the Scriptures. Study people's lives as well as their words, and if they don't match, watch out.

P—Pursue a godly lifestyle (3:11, 14). Whenever Christ's return is mentioned in the New Testament, the emphasis is always on right living. Real hope produces godliness.

E—Expect Christ's return (3:12). Pray through your day with the thought that Christ could return at any moment. You'll be surprised at how this practice will transform your attitude and inspire pure living.

Perhaps this dip into 2 Peter has already stirred your heart. What can you do to put HOPE into action?

What phrase or verse from Peter's letter can you carry with you today?



A Letter That Rattles Our Cage

Selections from 2 Peter

Peter penned his most urgent words to those whom he gave his life serving. He shared truths about living pure in a morally corrupt society (2 Peter 1), anchoring ourselves in the Scriptures in a time of doctrinal compromise (2 Peter 2), and fixing our hearts on Christ's return in a day of passing pleasures (2 Peter 3).

Last words are lasting words. Peter's final call to action is just as urgent in our world of moral corruption and doctrinal compromise. Peter's answer is straightforward: keep our eyes fixed on Christ and anticipate "a world filled with God's righteousness" (3:13) when Christ returns.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I believe Your plan for the world is playing out just as You intended. My heart yearns for the return of Christ and the new creation that will follow. I long for Your righteousness to fill the earth. But first, fill me with Your righteousness, and keep me diligent in my walk with Christ. In His name, amen.



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A Study of 2 Peter

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To Be Useful and Fruitful, Here's How

2 Peter 1:1–11

With God's gift of eternal life comes the joy and rewards of living for Him while we're on this earth.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

DEEP in our souls is a yearning for significance. People need to know that their lives matter. That *who they are* and *what they do* are important, valued, and appreciated. As followers of Christ, we especially want to make a difference for good in our world and for the kingdom of God.

When this hunger for usefulness goes unmet, people wither inside. They may watch others using their gifts and helping others, and they wonder whether they have what it takes.

Truthfully, however, all believers have what it takes to be significant in God's kingdom—despite their limitations and weaknesses. Peter, whose courage crumbled when he denied Christ three times, declared it so:

“By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life.” (2 Peter 1:3)

We have *everything* we need! God has enabled us with the Holy Spirit's power and, as Peter will explain, given us promises that secure our relationship with Him. Our part is to put our confidence in God and act on what He says. As we do, our character grows and so does our fruitfulness. In God's kingdom, anyone can be useful even when they stumble—Peter is a prime example. In the passage for this *Searching the Scriptures* study, he will show us how.



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To Be Useful and Fruitful, Here's How

2 Peter 1:1–11



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Perhaps past failure has discouraged you. Or maybe you feel limited by your circumstances. Invite the Lord to reassure you through His Word.

Father, You know me and You know my past. Show me through Your Word how I can be useful and fruitful for You. I am willing, but I admit my hesitation and doubts. Encourage me through Your Spirit and Your truth. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The recipients of 2 Peter were gentile Christians in churches scattered throughout Asia Minor, which is modern-day Turkey. Peter was known as the “apostle to the Jews” (Galatians 2:8), but he ministered to all Christians throughout the Roman Empire—from Antioch (2:11) to Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:12) to Rome (1 Peter 5:13). A member of Jesus’ inner circle of disciples, Peter knew Jesus like few others did. He was one of the “pillars of the church” (Galatians 2:9), whose authority and teaching were highly respected.

False teachers, however, had charmed their way into the churches. These crooks had lured the sheep away from Christ and led them into thickets of heresy and sin. Jesus had told Peter to “take care of my sheep” (John 21:16), and so, as a faithful shepherd, Peter gently guided the flock back into the fold of truth in the opening verses of 2 Peter.



Observation: Faith and Power, Promises and Virtues

Peter packed each word and phrase in 2 Peter 1:1–11 with spiritual treasures. Begin your search for meaning with careful observation, the first step in *Searching the Scriptures*. Read the passage slowly and aloud a couple of times, pausing often to let the words sink in.



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To Be Useful and Fruitful, Here's How

2 Peter 1:1–11

Our Foundation of Faith—2 Peter 1:1–2

The false teachers submitted to no one. Under what authority did Peter place himself in the first line of [2 Peter 1:1](#)? How did Peter identify himself?

In the second part of [1:1](#), what did Peter, a Jewish believer, share with his gentile readers? What links all believers?

Don't miss how Peter referred to Jesus Christ. What truth did Peter affirm that false teachers often denied?



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To Be Useful and Fruitful, Here's How

2 Peter 1:1–11

What did Peter pray that God would give the believers, according to [2 Peter 1:2](#)?

In just two verses, Peter set his readers on a bedrock of truth. At the heart of our faith is Jesus Christ, our God and Savior. Through our faith in Jesus, God pours out His grace and peace in us to help us know Him. The more we know God, the more grace and peace He gives us—which draws us into even deeper knowledge of Him.

But that's not all God gives us through Christ. In 2 Peter 1:3–4, Peter described even more.

We give our sinfulness to Christ, and He gives us His righteousness, hope, faith, and the assurance of eternal life. The reason this transfer is possible is the grace of God. Our purpose, usefulness, and fruitfulness begin with grace. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

God's Power and Promises—2 Peter 1:3–4

Observe the twice-repeated phrase “given us” in [2 Peter 1:3–4](#) (“granted to us,” NASB). What did Peter say God has granted to us? By what means?



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To Be Useful and Fruitful, Here's How

2 Peter 1:1–11

Peter stated that God's power enables us to live "a godly life" (2 Peter 1:3). What do God's promises enable us to do, according to 2 Peter 1:4?

Here are a few of God's promises: forgiveness to the sinful, strength for the weary, rewards for the undeserving, blessing for the obedient, comfort in the struggle, power to the weak, hope to the dying, His presence in threatening situations, and resurrection at Christ's return. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Our Participation—2 Peter 1:5–11

What seven traits did Peter say we should cultivate to "supplement" our faith, according to 2 Peter 1:5–7?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____



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To Be Useful and Fruitful, Here's How

2 Peter 1:1–11

What is the benefit of growing in these qualities, according to 2 Peter 1:8?

One thing leads to another, doesn't it? Faith in Christ taps into God's grace and peace, which help us know God. God supplies His power and promises, which enable us to develop godly virtues. The result: *a useful and fruitful life*.

Believers who don't follow these steps don't grow. They don't fulfill the reason Christ saved them in the first place—specifically, “to share [God's] divine nature and escape the world's corruption” (1:4). They are “shortsighted or blind” (1:9), unable to see the value of a relationship with Christ. With what exhortation did Peter conclude his teaching in 1:10–11?

Do you ever wonder what to work on in your life? Here's a list of virtues worth developing. It's a list from God. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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To Be Useful and Fruitful, Here's How

2 Peter 1:1–11



Interpretation: Virtues Worth Developing

Defining key words aids our interpretation of a passage. Use the following chart to record the definitions of Peter's list of virtues in [2 Peter 1:5–7](#). Click on the Greek word that links to the Greek dictionary at [billmounce.com](#). If you don't have internet access, use a commentary on 2 Peter or even a dictionary to write down the meaning of the English words.

Term	Definition
“moral excellence” (arete)	
“knowledge” (gnosis)	
“self-control” (enkrateia)	
“patient endurance” (hypomone)	
“godliness” (eusebeia)	
“brotherly affection” (philadelphia)	
“love” (agape)	



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2 Peter 1:1–11

Peter constructed these qualities like stairsteps, one leading to the next. Why did Peter list these steps in this order? In other words, why must moral excellence precede knowledge? Or, put another way, why is knowledge useless without moral excellence? Likewise, why must knowledge come before self-control? And so forth.

Peter was describing the steps of Christian maturity—the sanctification process that begins on the ground level of *faith* in Christ and leads to the top step of Christlike *love*. Through Christ, God makes available His power and promises. However, sanctification doesn't just happen. We must “make every effort” (2 Peter 1:5).

Explain the role of *effort* in sanctification.

God granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness. It's our basic equipment, but it requires our acting upon it. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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To Be Useful and Fruitful, Here's How

2 Peter 1:1–11



Correlation: Our Model of Love

No one has embodied all the virtues in Peter's list like Jesus did. Jesus stands alone at the highest levels of moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, patient endurance, godliness, brotherly affection, and, ultimately, love. How do the following verses describe the divine love of Jesus?

John 15:13: _____

Romans 5:8: _____

Ephesians 5:2: _____

Just as physical traits run in families, so also character traits run in God's family. We bear the closest family resemblance with Christ when we love as He loved.

*The best definition of Christian love is this: "seeking the highest good of another person."
It doesn't mean we always agree, but we do whatever is best for the other person.*
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Moving Forward in Christlikeness

To develop the qualities in 2 Peter 1:5–7, we don't need a college education or a high IQ. We don't need a certain talent. But we do need diligence, which begins with *intention*.

Did Peter's staircase of Christian qualities stir in you a desire to take the next step? What decision might you need to make?



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To Be Useful and Fruitful, Here's How

2 Peter 1:1–11

Which trait in the list would you like to ask God to help you develop? Use the following space to write your request for His enablement.

The ancient Greek philosophers advocated virtues, but they could offer people no power to achieve them. Through faith in Christ, we have the Holy Spirit's power and God's promises that guarantee our relationship with Him.

What is one habit you can build into your daily routine to tap into the spiritual resources you have in Christ?

The more you display Christ's virtues, the sweeter your life's fruit becomes. You can be certain that God sees that fruit—even if you feel overlooked by others. Cling to God's promise of eternal reward: "He will not forget how . . . you have shown your love to him by caring for other believers" (Hebrews 6:10). Love God with all your heart. Let Christ's love spill over to others.

That's how to be useful and fruitful in God's kingdom.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I long to be useful and fruitful for You. Thank You that Peter showed me the steps. Now I need Your power as I claim Your promises. Transform me into the kind of person who loves as Christ loved. In His name, amen.



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CONQUERING THROUGH CONFLICT

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Be Sure of Your Source

2 Peter 1:12–21

Finding God's message is not some cosmic guessing game. God has given us His Word in written form in the Bible.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

DESPERATE to find answers to life's important questions, people will sometimes trust anyone who claims to possess the truth. The churches that Peter addressed in 2 Peter were infiltrated by persuasive teachers who were probably intelligent, well-educated, and likeable. Yet, they themselves were deceived as well as deceptive, leading others into the same dangerous errors.

Peter wasn't the only apostle concerned about vulnerable Christians. Paul warned his readers about people who "try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth" (Ephesians 4:14). Like Peter, Paul sought to anchor Christians to God's Word so they wouldn't "be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching" (4:14).

Today's shady influencers are equally skilled at tricking people into believing anything that sounds good or feels right. It's not uncommon for even Christians to dabble in praying to deceased relatives, wearing crystals for "positive energy," or calling on the universe for help.

Why do people do this? Why are the masses eager to follow the latest guru or some expert with secret knowledge? Primarily because of our deep longing for truth. Peter points us to a single authoritative source of truth, and in *this* source we can be sure.



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Be Sure of Your Source

2 Peter 1:12–21



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Do you long for insight regarding your relationships, purpose, well-being, or future? Bring this desire for truth to the Lord in prayer.

Father, every day, I hear people pitching “secrets” to happiness. Lead me to Your truth, the solid rock on which I can build my life with confidence. Thank You for lighting my way with Scripture. Illumine my mind and speak to my heart through Your Word. In Jesus’ name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Knowing he would die soon, Peter wrote 2 Peter as a memorial that would stand long after his death. He opened by stating the source of his authority: “This letter is from Simon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1). Available to all believers are God’s power and promises which enable us to share in God’s “divine nature and escape the world’s corruption” (1:4).

The seven virtues he told us to add to our faith in [1:5–6](#) mirror God’s character and were perfectly modeled by Christ. We bear good fruit when we exhibit these virtues, and we show that we really are “among those God has called and chosen” (1:10)—unlike the false teachers who bore rotten fruit and who displayed vices more than virtues.

No doubt, Peter recalled Jesus’ warning about false prophets who would come as “ravenous wolves” in “sheep’s clothing” (Matthew 7:15 NASB). These wolves viciously attacked Peter’s credibility, accusing him of fabricating myths—the very thing they were doing.

In [2 Peter 1:12–21](#), Peter fended off their attacks with a defense of the deity of Christ and the authority and inspiration of Scripture. Let’s take a closer look at Peter’s masterful argument.



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CONQUERING THROUGH CONFLICT

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Be Sure of Your Source

2 Peter 1:12–21



Observation: Truth and Scripture

Read this passage, watching for key phrases such as “standing firm in the truth” (1:12), “we saw . . . with our own eyes” (1:16), “we have even greater confidence” (1:19), and “they spoke from God” (1:21). Observing the Scriptures shouldn’t be done in a hurry. Stroll. Don’t rush. Look for concepts that *repeat* for emphasis, note *metaphors*, and watch for *transitions*.

What the Truth Is and Isn’t—2 Peter 1:12–18

The transition word, *therefore*, in 2 Peter 1:12 is a bridge from what Peter has said to what he is about to say. What are “these things” that Peter refers to?

How did Peter know he would die soon, according to 1:13–15? How did Peter refer to death? What repeating concepts do you observe?



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Be Sure of Your Source

2 Peter 1:12–21

What God has revealed in His Word is true. Being God’s children, we should establish ourselves in His Word, confident that it is not a book of legends or myths. According to [2 Peter 1:16–18](#), what proof did Peter offer that he taught the truth about Christ? Write down the key words that support his claim.

At Jesus’ transfiguration, Peter witnessed Jesus’ appearance “transformed so that his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as light” (Matthew 17:2). He saw the “majestic splendor” of Christ (2 Peter 1:16) and heard “the majestic glory”—that is, God declaring Jesus as His “dearly loved Son” (1:17). Peter saw it with his own eyes and heard it with his own ears. This was no myth!

Peter heard God’s voice in the presence of God the Son. On that mountain, God spoke His Word. Peter said, “I was there.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Confidence We Have in the Scriptures—2 Peter 1:19–21

In [2 Peter 1:19–21](#), Peter segues from God’s revelation on the mountain to the revelation of God’s truth in the Scriptures. What transition word do you see? How did Peter trace the line of *authority* in the Scriptures from the prophets to God ([1:19–20](#))?



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CONQUERING THROUGH CONFLICT

A Study of 2 Peter

STUDY THREE

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STUDY

Be Sure of Your Source

2 Peter 1:12–21

What metaphors did Peter use in 2 Peter 1:19? To what do they refer?

How did Peter explain the *inspiration* of Scripture—the means God used to communicate through humans (2 Peter 1:21)?

When you direct your life to the Scriptures and draw your information from the Scriptures, you will have objective, reliable truth to live by. No one has ever said to me, “Because I relied on the Word of God, I wound up in error.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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2 Peter 1:12–21



Interpretation: You Can Trust the Bible

Wolves in sheep's clothing still attack the credibility of the Bible. These modern-day false teachers say that after Jesus' death, His disciples made up tales about Jesus to keep His legacy alive. They say that the actual Jesus never claimed to be God, performed miracles, or rose from the dead.

Thankfully, Peter's eyewitness testimony about Jesus and his defense of the inspiration of the Bible remain pure and trustworthy after all the mud-throwing. Read Pastor Chuck Swindoll's online article, "[Why You Can Have Confidence in the Bible](#)" at [insight.org](#), and write down a few points in the space below.

What does it mean that the writers of Scripture "were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21)?



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How are the words of Scripture “like a lamp shining in a dark place” (2 Peter 1:19)? What assurance does this image give you?

What future hope was Peter pointing to when he wrote “until the Day dawns, and Christ the Morning Star shines in your hearts” (1:19)?

Even highly intelligent men and women in our universities live in the murky waters of uncertainty about spiritual things. The Bible is authoritative, and we do well to pay attention to it. Let the light in! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Be Sure of Your Source

2 Peter 1:12–21



Correlation: Comparing Scripture to Scripture

Correlation is comparing Scripture passages to validate and deepen our interpretation. Scripture never contradicts itself, and it is its own best interpreter. So we should always view Scripture in light of the whole and never lift verses out of the biblical context.

Compare [2 Peter 1:20–21](#) with [2 Timothy 3:16–17](#). What additional insight regarding the inspiration and benefits of Scripture do you find?

God directed the writing of His Word. No wonder His Book is the sure, authoritative, inspired source of truth. No wonder the adversary is so determined to assault it and to encourage us to read the “stars” rather than read the Book. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Concluding Reminders

Let's sum up Peter's teaching into two convictions to remember on our search for truth.

When we turn to God's Word, we are consulting the most reliable source of truth. There's nothing better, nothing clearer, nothing more trustworthy than the Scriptures.

When we make other sources equal to or more reliable than Scripture, we soon fall into error. Beliefs and values direct thoughts and actions. God's truth makes us flourish, not flounder.



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In our pluralistic society, people pick and choose their favorite teaching from a smorgasbord of religions and philosophies. How can you know what to believe? Write down some guidelines based on your study of 2 Peter 1:12–21.

What attacks on the authority of Scripture have you heard? How does Peter's testimony and defense help you fend off these attacks?

What is your final authority in life? Peter urges you to stand firm in the Scriptures. Its words are the lamp shining in the darkness. The writers of the Bible spoke from God and wrote the truth about Christ, the Morning Star, who should always be our guide.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, Your Word alone is perfect and trustworthy, right and pure. Your Word is the lamp that guides my way and leads me to Jesus, the light of the world. Jesus' words are a solid foundation on which to build my life, my hope, and my future. Guide me with Your counsel and lead me to glory. In Jesus' name, amen.



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CONQUERING THROUGH CONFLICT

A Study of 2 Peter

STUDY FOUR

An Exposé of Counterfeit Communicators

2 Peter 2:1–3

The servants of Satan sound caring, intelligent, and worth your trust, but they are false. They are truth-twisters and mind-benders, and they will love you to the very pit of hell.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

ONCE in a while, the Lion of Judah uncaged His righteous anger and let it roar. Jesus drove out the merchants and “money changers” who were cheating worshipers at the temple (Matthew 21:12). He lashed out at the hypocritical Pharisees who concealed their “greed and self-indulgence” (23:25) while crushing people under “unbearable religious demands” (23:4).

Those who incited Jesus the most were the *religious counterfeits*, spiritual leaders who took advantage of people who were sincerely seeking God. When Jesus responded in anger, the light of divinity flashed in His eyes—His holiness, His justice, and His passion to protect vulnerable souls.

A counterfeit is something that looks and sounds right but is “contrary to fact,” an imitation meant to mislead the unsuspecting. Religious counterfeits don’t look like phonies. Oh, no. They display impressive credentials and dress up their lies in spiritual garb to look like truth. They are skilled at the art of lying. They are expert con artists who lure people to trust them, and then steal their money and their faith.

Jesus foretold that “false prophets will appear and will deceive many people” (24:11). Peter never forgot Jesus’ warning, and he learned from the Master how to deal with these counterfeits. So, when he saw them creeping into the churches, the old apostle let out a roar of his own.



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An Exposé of Counterfeit Communicators

2 Peter 2:1–3



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Perhaps your loved one or friend has fallen prey to spiritual counterfeits. Your heart aches as you watch his or her innocent faith in Christ stolen away. Pray that the Lord will expose the lies and make His truth clear.

Father, shine Your light into the hearts of those who have been lured into the darkness and deceived by counterfeits. Make clear to me Your truth so that I may help others find in Christ the hope of eternal life and the way of peace. In His name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Having testified to the reliability of the apostles and prophets in 2 Peter 1:16–21, Peter turned his gaze on the false, or “pseudo,” teachers in the opening of chapter 2. These deceivers were nothing like the apostles and prophets who “spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:21). The roots of the false teachers go back to the false prophets in Israel, who blended in with the true prophets like tares among the wheat. In the same way, the false teachers in the churches disguised themselves as true apostles, claiming equal authority.

The false teachers, however, didn’t speak from God. The Holy Spirit didn’t inspire them. Their words didn’t shine like lamps. Rather, their clever lies blanketed people in darkness. How should the church respond? Peter’s first action as an apostle was to expose them by naming their treacherous offenses.



Observation: Characteristics of Counterfeits

Let’s use our *Searching the Scriptures* skills of observation, interpretation, correlation, and application. First, observe 2 Peter 2:1–3 carefully. Imagine yourself as a first-century Christian reading Peter’s letter to a group of believers who listen intently to every word. Write down your observations as you answer the following questions.



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2 Peter 2:1–3

In the opening line of [2 Peter 2:1](#), Peter compared the false teachers in the church with the false prophets in Israel. What feelings might Peter's comparison have evoked in the early Christians?

In the next line of [2:1](#), Peter stated what false teachers will do . . . and were doing. What do you observe in Peter's indictment?

Tragically, before the false teachers' destruction, what did Peter say will happen in [2:2](#)? If you were an early Christian, how would you have reacted to this statement—particularly, if you had already fallen prey to these con artists?



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2 Peter 2:1–3

What other harm did Peter say the false teachers will cause in [2 Peter 2:3](#)?

Summarize your observations by writing a list of Peter's characteristics of counterfeits.

Counterfeits don't look counterfeit. They look real. They sound great. But the fact is, they are destructive. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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An Exposé of Counterfeit Communicators

2 Peter 2:1–3



Interpretation: Heresy, Denial, Immorality, Greed

Now let's *interpret* our passage by probing a few key ideas. The Greek word for “heresy” is *hairesis*, which conveys the idea of “a choice or option.”¹ Heresies offer alternative doctrines contrary to established truth, “orthodoxy,” and pressure people to choose against everything they previously believed. Peter called these heresies “cleverly” taught and “destructive” (2 Peter 2:1). What did he mean by “cleverly”? How are they destructive?

False teachers bring their teaching alongside orthodox teaching and call into question the truth you have been taught. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Another characteristic of false teachers was they *denied* “the Master who bought them” (2:1). The “Master” is Christ and everything Christ said and did. What specific truths about Christ did these false teachers deny? What did Peter mean when he said Christ “bought them” (the false teachers)?



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2 Peter 2:1–3

Next, the false teachers *promoted immorality*, which enticed many followers (2 Peter 2:2). How do you think they twisted the apostles' teaching to license immorality? Hint: look at Paul's words in [Romans 6:15–16](#).

Want to have a big following? Get sloppy with grace. People love to hear that their sin is okay. Grace, however, doesn't mean that we can live as we please. It means we're free to obey Jesus Christ. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The final mark of false teachers is greed. They *exploited the weak* by taking unfair advantage of others to get money, power, or prestige for themselves. They manipulated people with “false words” (2 Peter 2:3 NASB). The Greek word for “false” is *plastos*, from which we get the English word, *plastic*. How can words be *plastic*? How can they be used to mislead others for gain?

The true minister doesn't do what he does for money. A person with integrity has nothing to hide, doesn't flatter, doesn't cater to the wealthy, doesn't play around with lust, doesn't require unquestioned loyalty. All of these are characteristics of greed. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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An Exposé of Counterfeit Communicators

2 Peter 2:1–3



Correlation: The Original Counterfeit

We *correlate*—or compare—Scriptures to enhance our understanding. Although Peter was pointing his finger at the counterfeits in the church, they were merely pawns in the game. Who is the mastermind counterfeiter, according to Paul in [2 Corinthians 11:1–3](#)? What did He do?

Satan targets our thoughts with his deceptions, knowing once we accept his reasoning, our will and emotions will follow. His truth-twisting undermines “pure and undivided devotion to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3). What did Jesus call him in [John 8:44](#)? What did Jesus mean?

How did the deceivers in the early church imitate their master, according to [2 Corinthians 11:13–15](#)?



An Exposé of Counterfeit Communicators

2 Peter 2:1–3

Summarize Satan's goal and method to achieve his goal. How is Satan just as active today?

False teachers appear to embrace orthodoxy, but they present heresy. They appear to stand for the truth, but they deny biblical truth. They appear to love grace, but they model sensuality. They appear to have our good at heart, but they are greedy for their own good.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: How to Spot the Counterfeit

We can't avoid counterfeits, but we can avoid being hoodwinked by them. Here are three tips that can help us: *stop*, *look*, and *listen*.

Stop. Refuse to blindly accept someone else's authority. Stop long enough to compare what is being taught with what the Scriptures teach.

Look. Take a careful look at the life of the main spokesperson. Is the fruit of the Spirit evident, or the deeds of the flesh ([Galatians 5:19–23](#))? Look past the charisma to the person's character.

Listen. False teachers will toss around orthodox words, such as *inspiration*, *incarnation*, or *salvation*, but twist their meanings. Pay attention to the terms the person uses and how he or she defines them.



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2 Peter 2:1–3

Have you been a victim of someone who used his or her spiritual authority to take advantage of you? Have any of your family members or friends been victimized? If so, it was heartbreaking. What wounds did you or the others suffer?

In the aftermath, what is helping you heal and move forward?

How can Peter's exposé and the "stop, look, and listen" principles protect you in the future?



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An Exposé of Counterfeit Communicators

2 Peter 2:1–3

The best Bible teachers may disagree on some minor points, but they will always agree on the essentials: the person of Christ, the triune God, the authority and inspiration of Scripture, the virgin birth, Christ's death on our behalf, His resurrection, and His imminent return.

Become familiar with the foundations of the faith so you can immediately spot heresies. Knowing the truth is your best protection against counterfeits.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, false teachers can do great harm to me and others I love. Protect Your young lambs against the wolves who prey on the innocent. Give me the insight to perceive the threat and the heart of a lion to defend the vulnerable. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. William D. Mounce, "haireisis," billmounce.com/greek-dictionary/haireisis.



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CONQUERING THROUGH CONFLICT

A Study of 2 Peter

STUDY FIVE

The God of Wrath and Rescue

2 Peter 2:4–11

The Bible delivers the bad news about all the evil in the world. But it also reveals the good news—what God plans to do about it.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IF all we knew of the world was what we heard in the news, we'd probably conclude that humanity is in irreparable shape. Reports of wars, scandals, homicides, and corruption fill the headlines, and no one knows what to do about it. The situation can feel hopeless.

The good news, however, is that God is doing something about humanity's problems, and His plan is rooted in His nature. On the one hand is *God's compassion*. Jeremiah took heart when, after Jerusalem's downfall, he remembered:

*The faithful love of the LORD never ends!
His mercies never cease.
Great is his faithfulness;
his mercies begin afresh each morning.* (Lamentations 3:21–23)

Darkness may cover the landscape, but all is not lost. Lighting up the horizon is the hope of God's mercy—as well as the promise of *God's judgment*. God does not look the other way when people wrong one another and when evil corrupts His creation. His love demands justice, and we can be certain that He is in the process of setting things right.



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The God of Wrath and Rescue

2 Peter 2:4–11

In Peter's day, false teachers had slipped into the churches like wolves, preying on the vulnerable sheep. That was the bad news. In [2 Peter 2:4–11](#), Peter offered good news based upon both God's compassion and judgment—the same divine attributes that give us hope as well.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Come near to our compassionate Lord in prayer as you begin your study.

Father, You alone are worthy of dispensing justice in our world. I trust You to judge rightly, knowing that You are holy and good. Still, my heart breaks for those I love who don't know You yet. Reveal Your heart to me through Your Word and help me rest in the wisdom of Your ways. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

So far in Peter's indictment of the false teachers in 2 Peter 2, Peter has listed four charges against them:

1. Deceitfully teaching heresies ([2 Peter 2:1](#))
2. Denying Christ and His work of redemption ([2:1](#))
3. Luring the weak into immorality ([2:2](#))
4. Conning church members out of their money ([2:3](#))

Now, in our passage for this *Searching the Scriptures* study, the apostle cites precedents from the Old Testament regarding how the God of wrath and rescue plans to judge these false teachers while preserving the faithful.



The God of Wrath and Rescue

2 Peter 2:4–11



Observation: Judging the Wicked, Rescuing the Righteous

Observation helps us see what the biblical text is saying before we jump to conclusions about its meaning. Read [2 Peter 2:4–11](#) in the *New Living Translation* and the *New American Standard Bible*.

The NLT divides the passage into shorter sentences, making it easier to digest. But the NASB reflects the actual grammatical structure of the Greek text—2:4–10a is one sentence!

Peter hung his substantial sentence on an “if-then” literary framework. Write down the phrase immediately following the “ifs,” which lead to the concluding “then” in 2:9.

“For if God did not spare _____ **even the angels who sinned** _____” (2:4 NASB)

“and did not spare _____” (2:5 NASB)

“but protected _____” (2:5 NASB)

“and if He condemned the cities of _____” (2:6 NASB)

“and if He rescued _____” (2:7 NASB)

“then the Lord knows how to _____” (2:9 NASB)

With this structural overview in mind, let’s observe the specifics.



The God of Wrath and Rescue

2 Peter 2:4–11

Examples of Judging and Rescuing—2 Peter 2:4–8

Use the following chart to record what Peter said about those God judged and those He rescued. Also, read through the Old Testament passages that give the context for Peter’s comments.

Verses	Judged	Rescued	Context
2:4		N/A	Genesis 6:1–2; Jude 6
2:5			Genesis 6:5–22
2:6–8			Genesis 19:1–16

Summarize what you observed about the kinds of sins Peter referenced that led to God’s judgments.



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The God of Wrath and Rescue

2 Peter 2:4–11

Why did God show mercy on those He rescued? What spiritual quality did they possess, according to 2 Peter 2:5, 7–8 NASB?

According to [Romans 4:1–5](#), Abraham possessed the same quality. How did he receive his righteousness? How do we receive it?

The Lord knows how to rescue the godly. If He could preserve Noah and if He could rescue Lot, He knows how to rescue you as well. The secret is that you are rightly related to Jesus Christ. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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The God of Wrath and Rescue

2 Peter 2:4–11

Peter's Conclusion—2 Peter 2:9–11

In light of how God judged some and showed compassion on others in the past, what conclusion did Peter draw in [2 Peter 2:9](#)?

But the apostolic prosecutor wasn't finished. What further charges did Peter level on the false teachers, according to [2:10–11](#)?

Peter was on a truth-telling mission. He tore off the masks of the false teachers to expose the hideous nature of their sin. Let's look closer at the extent of evil that prompted the judgment of God.

God's judgment, which is as certain as His compassion, will result in the punishment of all unbelievers. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



The God of Wrath and Rescue

2 Peter 2:4–11



Interpretation: The Extent of Evil and the Nature of Judgment

The *interpretation* of this passage plunges us into the depths of evil where we witness the awful fate God has in store for those who reject Christ and His offer of salvation.

Review the extent of evil displayed by the sinning angels, the wicked people in Noah's day, and the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, particularly in [Genesis 6:4–5](#); [13:12–13](#); [19:1–11](#) and [Jude 6](#).

How would you explain *depravity* based on these examples? For help defining this doctrine, consult your Bible-study resources or the entry on "[Depravity](#)" in the online *Encyclopedia of the Bible* at [biblegateway.com](#).

What destiny awaits fallen angels? Peter wrote that God threw the sinning angels "into hell, in gloomy pits of darkness, where they are being held until the day of judgment" (2 Peter 2:4). The word for "hell" in Greek is *Tartarus*. According to Pastor Chuck Swindoll, Peter used this term to designate

a deep, dark holding place for wicked spirits that prevents them from having any contact with or influence on the world. Like a cross between solitary confinement and death row, Tartarus is the place where the most wicked spirits await judgment.¹

The evil spirits in Jesus' day pled with Jesus not to send them to this awful place. What did they call it in [Luke 8:26–33](#)? Where will Satan be cast at Christ's return, according to [Revelation 20:3](#)?



The God of Wrath and Rescue

2 Peter 2:4–11

What is the final destiny for evil spirits and Satan, according to [Revelation 20:10](#)?

So, what conclusions can you draw from these two aspects of hell—the abyss (Tartarus) and the lake of fire? How are they similar and different?

What about the destiny of unbelievers? Let's examine Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus for the answer.



Correlation: Judgment for Unbelievers

The rich man in Jesus' parable lived in luxury, but his heart was cold and hard, evidenced by his lack of compassion toward poor Lazarus. Upon death, each man's position reversed. To what place did God take Lazarus' spirit and to what place did God send the rich man's spirit, according to [Luke 16:22–24](#)? What did the men experience?



The God of Wrath and Rescue

2 Peter 2:4–11

Jesus' parable illustrates what believers and unbelievers can anticipate in the afterlife. Those who put their faith in God's Son who bore the judgment for their sins will immediately enter the presence of God (2 [Corinthians 5:8](#)); however, "whoever does not have God's Son does not have life" (1 [John 5:13](#)). Like the rich man, their spirits remain in torment in the place of the dead called "Hades" (Luke 16:23 NASB), awaiting resurrection and final judgment.

What will happen at the final judgment described in [Revelation 20:11–15](#)?

The purpose of Peter's sobering tour of the afterlife was to impress upon us the reason not to follow false teachers. Peter was saying, *Don't link up with those whom God condemns. You won't find life in those who are spiritually dead.* Peter's warning is equally relevant in our world in which false teachers still deceive many.



Application: Encouragement and Exhortation

Peter encourages us to remain faithful as we await God's *certain rescue*. In his mercy, "The Lord knows how to rescue godly people from their trials" (2 [Peter 2:9](#)). We are safe in Christ. "For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 [Thessalonians 5:9](#)). How does this truth encourage you today in your trials?



The God of Wrath and Rescue

2 Peter 2:4–11

Likewise, Peter exhorts us to warn unbelievers about God’s *certain judgment*. Just as Jesus foresaw Jerusalem’s fall and wept over the city, we also weep for those who reject Christ’s mercy. Use the following space to pray for those you know who need Christ.

Jesus satisfied God’s wrath by bearing “our sins’ in his body on the cross” (1 Peter 2:24 NIV). Judgment for believers is behind them; however, judgment for unbelievers is before them. Keep looking for opportunities to speak the truth as Peter did to those who need to hear it. Never stop praying with hope for their salvation.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, Your Word is the light that cuts through the fog of popular false teaching that permeates our world. Through Your Spirit, help me discern truth from error. Keep my heart tender toward those who do evil and speak lies, for their judgment is near. May I always see others through Your tears of compassion. In Jesus’ name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on James, 1 & 2 Peter*, Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: 2015), 326.



CONQUERING THROUGH CONFLICT

A Study of 2 Peter

STUDY SIX

Disobedience Gone to Seed

2 Peter 2:12–19

Respect the promptings of your heart. If you feel reluctant about a teacher or leader, honor that. It's the Spirit's way of tapping you and saying, "Watch out. Be careful."

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

PEOPLE who believe everything they hear and follow any smooth talker who comes along are like ships that plow full speed ahead at night without a compass. Disaster awaits. They are like airplanes attempting to land without any instruments in a dense fog. They fly blind.

What's needed is discernment—skill and accuracy in reading character, as well as the perception to detect and identify the truth. Discernment helps us steer clear of error whenever it appears and live safely within the arms of truth. It's our internal umpire that blows the whistle when someone steps over the line. It's the ability to see beneath the surface, between the lines, and to correctly size up the situation. *So important.*

The letter of 2 Peter reminds us in vivid terms that false teachers are ready and waiting for anyone who lacks discernment. The moment these charlatans find a chink in someone's armor, especially that of a naïve Christian, their hidden blade of heresy will strike. So, Peter helps us to be discerning by describing these abusive authority figures as they really are.¹



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Disobedience Gone to Seed

2 Peter 2:12–19



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Paul prayed for his readers: “that your love may overflow more and more in real knowledge and all discernment” (Philippians 1:9 NASB). *Love, knowledge, and discernment*—three spiritual stabilizers. Pray for these qualities for yourself and those you love as you open God’s Word.

Father, only You can meet my deepest needs for love and acceptance. Fill me with Your love and stir my love for You in return. Give me knowledge of Your truth and bless me with discernment to perceive genuine love from false, and truth from error. In Christ’s name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Peter had already accused the false teachers of indulging in the flesh, despising authority, and arrogantly scoffing at angelic majesties “without so much as trembling” (2 Peter 2:10). But Peter wasn’t done unmasking these arrogant abusers. Layer by layer, he peeled away their façade to expose even uglier sin.

Reading Peter’s account of their treachery is like wading into a putrid swamp filled with the worst forms of depravity. “There is nothing quite like it elsewhere in the entire book. The misery and desolation of it are unrelieved,” wrote commentator J. H. Jowett.² Let’s progress slowly through this murky section, taking in a little at a time.



Observation: Depravity on Display

Read [2 Peter 2:12](#) and write down your *observations*. Observing a text is the first step toward discovering its meaning. What figure of speech did Peter use to describe how far the false teachers had fallen? How was it possible they sank so low?



Disobedience Gone to Seed

2 Peter 2:12–19

According to [2 Peter 2:13](#), what reprehensible behaviors did the false teachers love doing and delight in? What wages did their wrongs earn them?

How did Peter describe their predatory urges in [2:14](#)? Who was most vulnerable?

These men envision an opportunity for sin in every encounter. They prey on women who are naïve, who are lonely and who misinterpret lust for love and a caress as a genuine embrace. They entice “unstable souls” (2:14). —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

These reprobates used to walk God’s way, but what happened, according to [2 Peter 2:15–16](#)? In whose footsteps did they follow? How were the false teachers like their predecessor? For the backstory, read [Numbers 22:21–33](#).



Disobedience Gone to Seed

2 Peter 2:12–19

Peter called Balaam's sin against God a "mad course" (2 Peter 2:16) or "insanity" (NASB). How is a depraved mind-set similar to a mental psychosis?

Those who abandon the right way long enough and far enough move into the territory of temporary insanity. There's no limit to their sin at that point. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What word pictures did Peter use to describe the emptiness of the false teachers' character and promises in 2 Peter 2:17?

What narcissistic traits did Peter describe in 2:18–19? Entanglement with this type of false spiritual authority will inevitably lead to what end?



Disobedience Gone to Seed

2 Peter 2:12–19

They are springs, but they have no water. Spiritual mirages. They seem like the real thing, but they are not. Reprobates are empty people. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Principles to Live By

Peter hoped this disturbing journey through the swamp of sin would make a lasting impression on his readers. Let's *interpret* the passage by listing key lessons.

In 2 Peter 2:12–14, Peter said the false teachers were like “unthinking animals,” driven by their depraved appetites. Write down a principle or two about the consequences of disobedience gone to seed. What happens to the will of the person at this level of sin? What damage can he or she cause? Who gets hurt the most?

Peter traced the false teachers' moral corruption to its origin when they “wandered off the right road” (2 Peter 2:15). What principle can you draw from 2:15–16?



Disobedience Gone to Seed

2 Peter 2:12–19

These narcissistic teachers talked a good talk, but their words were “mist” (2 Peter 2:17); they “[bragged] about themselves” (2:18); they enticed others with their “twisted sexual desires” (2:18); and the freedom they flaunted was enslavement in disguise (2:19). List the principles that Peter was teaching about the signs of controlling, narcissistic people in [2:17–19](#).

Keep these principles handy. They are necessary tools in your bag of knowledge to help you discern truth from error and trustworthy people from predators. Another apostle who encouraged believers to be discerning was John. Let’s see what we can learn from him.



Correlation: Love Guided by Truth

In his second epistle to the churches, John addressed “the chosen lady” (2 John 1:1), who was possibly an actual woman in the church. This gracious lady opened her home for the sake of ministry. Her river of hospitality flowed freely to those who came to her door, including traveling teachers.

It was not uncommon for wicked men to exploit trusting Christians. John’s message to this woman, and to us, was this: *show love but be discerning*.

John advised his readers to live in what, according to [1:3](#)?



Disobedience Gone to Seed

2 Peter 2:12–19

Why are both qualities necessary, not just one or the other?

What practical guideline did John give in 2 John 1:10–11?

John's advice applied to Peter's readers as well. They should have slammed the door on the rogue teachers who denied Christ, but, instead, they rolled out the red carpet. Tragically, their lack of discernment caused them to become "partner[s] in the evil work" (2 John 1:11). They were enabling the false teachers' sinful behavior. How can we protect our churches against being lured into a false teacher's swamp? How can we guard ourselves against controlling, narcissistic people? Let's look at some helpful guidelines.



Application: Living in the Truth

The answer is to stabilize our spiritual foundation with the attributes we prayed for earlier: *love*, *knowledge*, and *discernment*. Here are three action steps based on these qualities.

First, *walk closely with God*. Love the Lord with your whole heart. Talk with Him daily about your fears, your burdens, and your hopes. Fellowship with Him through praise and worship. Filling your heart with love for God helps guard you from smooth-talking counterfeits.



Disobedience Gone to Seed

2 Peter 2:12–19

Second, *heed the counsel of His Word*. Know the Word. Look to the Scriptures as your source of truth, and listen only to those teachers who align with that source, especially about Christ.

Third, *respect the promptings of your heart*. Pay attention to God's still, small voice. As you walk closely with God and take His Word seriously, His Spirit will help you discern whether a certain person is trustworthy. If you feel reluctant, then honor that feeling and hold back. Learn to respect the Holy Spirit's restraint.

Are you navigating a stressful relationship with a person or leader whose disobedience has gone to seed? How can a balance of love, knowledge, and discernment stabilize you?

If you're having difficulty discerning what's right or wrong, true or false, seek counsel from a trustworthy Christian. Who can you talk to? What are the main issues you'd like to talk about?



Disobedience Gone to Seed

2 Peter 2:12–19

Spend a few moments communing with the Lord. Open your heart to His words from Scripture and seek His counsel. What truth from this study stands out as the most important guiding principle for you moving forward?

Peter hoped his journey through the false teachers' swamp of sin would open his readers' eyes to the dangers in front of them. Has it opened yours?



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for patiently walking with me through my disobedience. You have shown me the truth when I was tempted to follow error. You have watched over me even when I've run the wrong way. You have taught me the way I should go. Now, give me discernment to keep me on Your path and protect me from hurtful people. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Adapted from material originally published as "Think with Discernment" in Charles R. Swindoll, *Come Before Winter and Share My Hope* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 18–19.
2. J. H. Jowett, *The Epistles of St. Peter* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1906), 279–80.



CONQUERING THROUGH CONFLICT

A Study of 2 Peter

STUDY SEVEN

Which Is Worse? What Is Best?

2 Peter 2:20–3:2

It is better to have never known the truth than to have known it intellectually and defected from it.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

FALSE teachers are not ignorant. Often, they are the most educated people you might meet. The string of letters following their names display impressive credentials. Elite institutions drape them in accolades and invite them to speak at conferences. Their writings become bestsellers.

In public, they present themselves as trustworthy authorities. Anyone would be impressed by their sophisticated speech, smooth elocution, and winsome demeanor. In the ivory tower of academia, they live on the top floor . . . but they are not what they seem.

False teachers can seem profound and real, but they are empty and misleading. They appear to have answers and hope, but their words are little more than mist. They flaunt a freewheeling lifestyle, but their immoral deeds chain them to sin. “They promise freedom,” Peter wrote, “but they themselves are slaves of sin and corruption. For you are a slave to whatever controls you” (2 Peter 2:19).

With all their intelligence and education, these teachers should know better. They are familiar with the truth, but in their pride, they believe what’s false, and they are spiritually worse off than the ignorant. That’s the tragedy of their condition . . . and the warning to those who live in their shadow.



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S07
1

Which Is Worse? What Is Best?

2 Peter 2:20–3:2



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you open the Word, open your heart to the One who is Truth. You may wish to pray like this:

Father, help me understand Your truth from this passage of Scripture. The words on the page are words of life to me because they come from Your heart. They reveal Your nature and Your ways, and I long to walk in them. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Peter began his letter by shoring up the doctrinal foundation the false teachers had undermined. The cornerstone of faith is Jesus Christ. Through Christ, God has given the believers His power and promises, which enable us to live godly lives (2 Peter 1:1–3), exhibited by Christlike virtues (1:4–11).

Peter urged his first-century readers to rely on the solid teaching they had already heard—the message of the apostles and prophets—and not let the false teachers sidetrack them into heresy and sin. In our passage for this *Searching the Scriptures* study, Peter brought them to a decision point. He closed his case against the false teachers by showing his readers *what's worse* in 2:20–22, *what's best* in 3:1–2, and then invited them to choose.



Observation: Which Is Worse? What Is Best?

A good rule of thumb in observing a text is to understand its *context*. Review [2 Peter 2:1–19](#). In these verses, Peter painted a raw and realistic portrait of the false teachers with words such as “evil teaching,” “shameful immorality,” and “greed” (2 Peter 2:2–3). What other descriptions of the false teachers stand out to you?



Which Is Worse? What Is Best?

2 Peter 2:20–3:2

Although these false teachers claimed to be Christians, they were not true believers. Which of Peter's statements indicated their spiritual condition?

The way of the false teachers led them and their followers to what end, according to 2 Peter 2:20?

What does the metaphor *tangled up* reveal about the “wickedness of the world” (2 Peter 2:20)?



Which Is Worse? What Is Best?

2 Peter 2:20–3:2

Having listed the false teachers' sins and consequences, Peter then addressed a question: Which is worse, *ignorance* of the truth or *defection* from the truth? What was Peter's answer in 2 Peter 2:21?

Earlier, Peter said these scoffers were “like unthinking animals” (2 Peter 2:12). In 2:22, he echoed his accusation with a proverb. What proverb did Peter quote? What was he saying about the nature of counterfeits?

The pig's nature is to go back to the mire, and so it is with false teachers. They may dress up and play the part, but they have the nature of an unbeliever. The externals do not tell the truth about the internal. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

As we turn the page to chapter 3, Peter restated his purpose for writing his letter, which was what in 3:1?



Which Is Worse? What Is Best?

2 Peter 2:20–3:2

In contrast to the way of the false teachers, on what did Peter want his readers to build their lives, according to 2 Peter 3:2? Write down Peter's three solid sources of truth in this verse.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

We need to be reminded of what we already know more than we need to be given new information. More information is not that helpful. We need orthodox truth, and we need to act upon what was written. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Ignorance Is Better Than Rejection

Peter pronounced a gravely serious charge against the false teachers:

It would be better if they had never known the way of righteousness than to know it and then to reject the command they were given to live a holy life. (2 Peter 2:21)

What did Peter mean? Remember, Peter was talking about people who claimed to be Christians but were fakes. They denied “the Master who bought them” (2:1). Jesus’ sacrifice paid the debt “for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2), including their debt. However, the false teachers refused to accept Christ’s atonement, so they remained in their sin. They knew *of Christ*, but they had no faith *in Christ*.

With this in mind, what did Peter mean when he said that it would have been better if they “had never known” (2 Peter 2:21)? Why is ignorance of Christ better than rejection? For help with the answer, consult Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s commentary, *Insights on James, 1 & 2 Peter*. An online resource is Constable's Notes at netbible.org.



Which Is Worse? What Is Best?

2 Peter 2:20–3:2

Another label for these rejectors is *apostates*. They aren't true believers who struggle with doubts or slide into carnality. Apostates deliberately defect, and then, with defiance in their hearts, they purposely oppose the mainstream teaching of the Christian faith and plant seeds of division and dissension in believing communities. Their bad fruit indicates they were never believers in the first place.

Why might an apostate “enslaved by sin again” be “worse off” (2 Peter 2:20) than when they had no knowledge of Christ?

Let's take a step further and explore the eternal side of the issue, based on a parable of Jesus recorded in Luke.



Correlation: Degrees of Judgment

Judgment awaits all those without Christ, but Jesus hinted that there may be degrees of judgment. Read Jesus' parable about the faithful and unfaithful servant in [Luke 12:42–48](#). What did Jesus say about the consequences of those who knew God's truth but turned away versus those who never knew?



Which Is Worse? What Is Best?

2 Peter 2:20–3:2

What principle was Jesus teaching about God? What warning was He giving to His listeners?

Peter rang a similar warning bell to wake up the Christians who had fallen under the false teachers' spell. Peter's purpose wasn't to rebuke the believers as much as to remind them of the truth and to stir them to stay faithful. If we listen closely, we can still hear his encouragement ringing.

Peter wrote his letter to stimulate wholesome thinking. Having given an entire chapter to the false teachers, he looked at his readers and addressed them as "Beloved" (2 Peter 3:1 NASB). —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Encouraging Words to Christ's Beloved

Let's close with three encouragements. First, *put into action what you know*. With knowledge comes responsibility. Is there a response to God's Word that you have been avoiding? What step can you take to act on what you've heard?



Which Is Worse? What Is Best?

2 Peter 2:20–3:2

Second, *be accountable for that which you are responsible*. Peter hinted at accountability in the Greek word for “wholesome” in 2 Peter 3:1—*eilikrines*. The word means, “that which being viewed in the sunshine is found clear and pure.”¹ Peter intended us to have a wholesome, “sun-judged,” walk with Christ—no cracks or impurities when examined in the light. Is there someone to whom you can reveal your soul? What steps might you take to build accountability into your life?

Third, *return often to orthodox truth*. Rather than looking to visions and dreams for direction or relying on the latest self-help fad, keep on studying God’s Word—which you are doing! You’re doing what Peter hoped his readers would do. Be encouraged! Now, find someone with whom you can share what you’re learning so you both can grow in the Light.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for protecting me from false teachers in the church who try to choke the life out of those who truly believe in Christ. Give me eyes to see the tares among the wheat, and help me walk faithfully in integrity and truth. In Jesus’ name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. William D. Mounce, “eilikrines,” billmounce.com/greek-dictionary/eilikrines.



CONQUERING THROUGH CONFLICT

A Study of 2 Peter

STUDY EIGHT

Skeptics and Sinners, Beware!

2 Peter 3:1–7

As long as there have been saints on the earth, there have been scoffers to attack the faith of the saints.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

EVERYWHERE we go, we see examples of scoffers defaming Christianity. It's rare to turn on the television or go to the movies and not see at least one Christian truth splayed out and barbecued on the screen. In the media, on the college campus, in the workplace, and even at the local store, our faith is under fire.

The enemies of Christ don't just target truth. They also attack those who speak the truth and try to live by it. Paul warned that "everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). *Everyone*, not just some; and he wasn't talking about mild disagreements but bold, blatant, brash mocking and overt public rejection for following Christ.

Peter sounded the same alarm, but he said the threat would come from within the church. "There will be false teachers among you" (2 Peter 2:2). Even our churches and seminaries are a hunting ground for those who "scoff at things they do not understand" (2:12).

The apostles didn't intend their promises of persecution to frighten or discourage us but to inspire our resolve and confirm our faith. We shouldn't be surprised when scoffers attack. Instead, we should face persecution calmly, knowing it is a sign that we're living in the last days, Christ is coming, and we're on the right track.



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CONQUERING THROUGH CONFLICT

A Study of 2 Peter

STUDY EIGHT

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY

Skeptics and Sinners, Beware!

2 Peter 3:1–7



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Invite the Lord to fill you with anticipation of Christ's return.

Father, You are faithful to Your promises and trustworthy in Your Word to bring about everything You decreed in ages past. From eternity to eternity, You are Lord. I praise Your works and cling to the hope of Christ coming soon. Open my mind to understand Your plan for the future. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Since Christians know scoffers will come, they can prepare now. They can plant their feet firmly on Christ and the solid foundation of Scripture, assured that the day is coming when mockers will be silenced and persecutions stopped. Read [2 Peter 3:1–7](#) as an overview, noting Peter's reassurance to the godly in 3:1–2 and warning to the ungodly in 3:3–7.



Observation: Reassurance and Warning

Use your skills of *observation* to identify the key words and central points in Peter's teaching. Closely examine every word. Each one is a stepping-stone to deeper understanding of God's message for you today.

Strong Reassurance for the Godly—2 Peter 3:1–2

In the previous *Searching the Scriptures* study, we noted Peter's purpose for his letter in [2 Peter 3:1](#). Write down what you observe in this verse.



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CONQUERING THROUGH CONFLICT

A Study of 2 Peter

STUDY EIGHT

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

Skeptics and Sinners, Beware!

2 Peter 3:1–7

If the believers remembered and obeyed Peter’s teaching, the crosswinds of heresy would not blow the church off course. They could listen to Peter with confidence because his teaching followed the spiritual compass set by “the holy prophets” and by what other two sources of truth in [2 Peter 3:2](#)?

There is something incredibly reassuring, calming, and encouraging about the timeless truths of God’s book. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Sober Warnings to the Ungodly—2 Peter 3:3–7

Earlier, the scoffing false teachers accused Peter of “making up clever stories when we told you about the powerful coming of the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:16). Peter anchored his credibility in his eyewitness account of Christ’s glory at the transfiguration (1:16–18) and to the Old Testament prophets who spoke from God (1:19–21).

In chapter 2, Peter shredded the false teachers’ credibility in a scathing exposé of their sin, and now, in chapter 3, he was ready to confront their arguments against Christ’s second coming. What did Peter affirm in [3:3](#)?



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A Study of 2 Peter

STUDY EIGHT

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY

Skeptics and Sinners, Beware!

2 Peter 3:1–7

What were the mockers attacking with their question in 2 Peter 3:4? What flimsy evidence did they cite to back up their accusation?

Peter countered by pointing to the past. In 3:5–6, how did Peter address the scoffers' claim that "everything has remained the same" (2 Peter 3:4)?

Then, in 3:7, what did Peter say would happen in the future?

God's judgment by flood foreshadowed God's future judgment by fire. In the next *Searching the Scriptures* study, we'll delve deeper into this future judgment. For now, let's interpret what Peter has said so far.



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Skeptics and Sinners, Beware!

2 Peter 3:1–7



Interpretation: How the Flood Forecasts the Future

Through the lens of *interpretation*, Peter's convictions come into view. First, Peter believed in Scripture as a unified whole. The "holy prophets" pointed to Jesus, the gospels revealed Jesus as "Lord and Savior," and the "apostles" spread Jesus' message to the world (2 Peter 3:2). What point about Scripture in [2 Peter 3:2](#) was Peter making to the Christians shaken by the scoffers?

Second, Peter believed we are in "the last days" (3:3). In what era of biblical history do the "last days" fit? How does increasing hostility from the world correlate with Christ's return? For help, consult the article, "[What does it mean that there will be scoffers in the last days?](#)" at gotquestions.org.



CONQUERING THROUGH CONFLICT

A Study of 2 Peter

STUDY EIGHT

SEARCHING
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Skeptics and Sinners, Beware!

2 Peter 3:1–7

Third, Peter believed God could alter nature at any time. Like the mockers in Peter's day, modern materialists assume that everything in the universe will keep going as it always has. According to Peter, these skeptics "deliberately forgot" two key points about God in [2 Peter 3:5–7](#). What realities did they intentionally overlook, and why are these truths central to our faith and hope?

Fourth, Peter believed that just because Christ hasn't returned yet doesn't mean He won't come. Scoffers sneer, "What happened to the promise that Jesus is coming again?" (2 Peter 3:4). How would you respond?

In case you tend to get demoralized by the attacks of scoffers, remember you are experiencing exactly what God told us would happen in the last days.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Skeptics and Sinners, Beware!

2 Peter 3:1–7



Correlation: Scoffers through Time

Since the beginning, scoffers have been nipping at the heels of God’s people. Take a brief tour of the many accounts of persecution in Scripture by reading the verses in the following chart and noting the abuses.

God’s Person	Verses	Scoffing
Moses	<i>Exodus 17:1–4</i>	
David	<i>2 Samuel 16:5–8</i>	
Elijah	<i>1 Kings 19:1–4</i>	
Nehemiah	<i>Nehemiah 4:1–4; 6:5–9</i>	
Jesus	<i>Mark 3:20–22; 15:16–19, 29–30</i>	
Paul	<i>2 Timothy 4:14–15</i>	

These are just a few persecutions suffered by God’s people in the Bible—and the attacks haven’t stopped. We might get the impression that persecutions will never end. But Peter’s good news assures us that a day is coming when scoffers will be silenced. May that day come soon!



CONQUERING THROUGH CONFLICT

A Study of 2 Peter

STUDY EIGHT

SEARCHING
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STUDY

Skeptics and Sinners, Beware!

2 Peter 3:1–7

Have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, because judgment is coming. The mocker may have his day now, but in eternity, it will all be over. Persecution will end. Mistreatment will be gone. All scoffing will cease. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Eternity Preparedness Kit

Those who live in a region prone to earthquakes are encouraged to pack an earthquake preparedness kit. If “the big one” hits, water supplies will be contaminated, power lines will be down, gas lines will be ruptured, and homes will be destroyed. To survive, people will need their own supplies of water, food, clothes, and medicine.

Just as we can’t predict when an earthquake will strike, we don’t know when Christ will come again. Christ may return at any moment—maybe before you finish reading this sentence! What do you need in your eternity preparedness kit? What can you do spiritually to be ready for Christ’s return?

Someday, all humanity will witness the glory of Jesus as Peter did on the mount of transfiguration—but to an exponentially greater degree. In the next study, we’ll examine the events that will follow Christ’s return. For now, simply imagine seeing your Savior face-to-face in all His majesty and splendor. What will that moment be like for you? What anticipation do you feel?



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CONQUERING THROUGH CONFLICT

A Study of 2 Peter

STUDY EIGHT

SEARCHING
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STUDY

Skeptics and Sinners, Beware!

2 Peter 3:1–7

How might the hope of Christ's return affect your attitude and response toward scoffers and mockers?

The nonstop barrage of attacks against our faith, our Savior, and the Bible can be discouraging. See the attacks, however, not as signs of defeat but as proof that what Scripture said would happen is happening. Also, remember, we suffer in good company—with the ranks of persecuted people who have suffered for their faith for centuries.

Scoffers may win today, but we can be certain that *God wins in the end*. Take comfort in knowing your future is secure. In your final prayer, follow Jesus by praying for those who persecute you just as He prayed for those who persecuted Him.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I pray for those who scoff at what they do not understand. The evil one has blinded their eyes so that they cannot see the glory of Your Son as I see Him. Their minds are clouded by lies, and their will is surrendered to sin. Oh Lord, save these poor souls and forgive those who do not know what they are doing. I pray not for escape but endurance and opportunities to declare Your love in this lost world. In Jesus' name, amen.



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CONQUERING THROUGH CONFLICT

A Study of 2 Peter

STUDY NINE

The Day of the Lord

2 Peter 3:7–13

Rather than seeing Christ's delay in coming as uncaring, see it as merciful and patient.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE subject of God's plan for the future has always sparked fascination. When Jesus foretold the destruction of the temple, the disciples perked up:

"Teacher," they asked, "when will all this happen? What sign will show us that these things are about to take place?" (Luke 21:7)

We'd have asked the same questions. Who isn't eager to pull back the curtain of time and peer into the future?

Scripture's prophecies paint a tantalizing picture of God's plan. And yet, while some things are revealed, much remains a mystery. Even the prophets saw only what God showed them, and a thick haze settled over the rest. So, it's a good idea to leave room for questions as we search for answers.

Certainly, on matters of doctrine—such as the resurrection of the dead, the return of Christ, the existence of heaven and hell, and the coming judgment day—we should stand firm. On debatable matters, however, patience with those who disagree with us is wise.

In our passage for this *Searching the Scriptures* study, Peter clears away some of the haze about the future, so let's peek behind the curtain and see the part of God's fascinating plan that Peter reveals.



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The Day of the Lord

2 Peter 3:7–13



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The subject of future events in Scripture can be challenging, so ask the Lord for insight as you open the Word.

Father, I seek to know what You want me to understand. Illuminate my mind through Your Spirit and stir my heart with the truth I discover. Give me insight into Your Word today. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The scoffers who opposed Peter jeered, “What happened to the promise that Jesus is coming again?” (2 Peter 3:4). They questioned whether Jesus really would return—and, by implication, whether Peter’s teaching could be trusted. When persecution intensifies, even true believers struggle with doubts about Christ’s coming. The scoffers, however, weren’t doubting; they were heckling.

In response, Peter pointed out: “They deliberately forget that God made the heavens long ago” (3:5). Since God made the world, then He can do as He pleases with it. He stepped in once when He judged humanity with the flood, and He will step in to judge it again someday. “The present heavens and earth have been stored up for fire,” Peter sternly warned, and on “the day of judgment, . . . ungodly people will be destroyed” (3:7).

In 2 Peter 3:8–13, Peter addressed the confused and hurting faithful. “Dear friends,” the aging apostle wrote tenderly (3:8). Putting his arm around them, he laid out the promise of their deliverance from judgment and the hope of life forever with God. In the same way, we can view the grim news of destruction in the light of God’s plan for our future with Him.



Observation: The End That Leads to a New Beginning

Careful *observation* is vital in this passage. Good interpretation depends on accurate observation, so take your time as you read and make notes.



The Day of the Lord

2 Peter 3:7–13

God's Mysterious Timetable—2 Peter 3:8

What truth about God did Peter remind the believers of in [2 Peter 3:8](#)? What rebuke was Peter making to the clock-watching skeptics?

God may appear late in acting, but He is never delayed. We can't use a wristwatch to determine God's plan for the future. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Salvation's Patient Plan—2 Peter 3:9

In the next verse, Peter clarified the reason God is waiting. What appears *sluggish* in our perception is *strategic* in God's plan. Why didn't God come sooner, according to [2 Peter 3:9](#)?

The Lord is not slow, He's patient. The Lord is not tardy, He is deliberately waiting. The Lord is not indifferent, He is merciful. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



The Day of the Lord

2 Peter 3:7–13

The End before the Beginning—2 Peter 3:10, 12

How will the Lord come, according to [2 Peter 3:10](#)? What's the point of Peter's comparison?

What will happen to the heavens? The elements? The earth?

What detail did Peter add in [3:12b](#)?

The Creator alone has the authority and the power to end this world. In His sovereign timing, God will release the atomic power stored within the elements, instantaneously obliterating the earth, sea, and sky. But what seems to be the end will be a new beginning for God's creation and His people.



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A Study of 2 Peter

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The Day of the Lord

2 Peter 3:7–13

God is in charge of “the day of the Lord.” It’s His day. The same One who created the earth reserves the right to end the earth. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Now and Then—2 Peter 3:11–13

Instead of fearing the day of the Lord, Peter said believers should look forward to it. To what are we looking forward, according to [2 Peter 3:11–13](#)?

How should this future hope impact our present behavior?

Prophecy in Scripture is not meant to be an end in itself. Prophetic truth should light a fire under our lives and change the way we live. The purpose of prophecy is not speculation. It’s motivation. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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The Day of the Lord

2 Peter 3:7–13



Interpretation: The Day of the Lord

Let's explore the meaning of "the day of the Lord" (2 Peter 3:10). In his commentary, *Insights on James, 1 & 2 Peter*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll sets Peter's use of the phrase in its biblical context:

In the Old Testament, it referred to any period of time when God sent judgment on the wicked, so there were many historical "days of the Lord"—like the flood of Noah or the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah. . . . Yet in the midst of the judgment, God promises that the righteous will be saved.¹

There are two sides to the "day of the Lord"—judgment and deliverance. When will this day come? Peter only said that it would come like a thief, *unexpectedly*—which is what Jesus taught in [Matthew 24:42–44](#). What details did Jesus give?

On that day, the "heavens and earth" will be destroyed by "fire" (2 Peter 3:7). Click on the links to Bill Mounce's online Greek dictionary and define the words Peter used to describe the intensity and devastation of God's fiery judgment:

"*roar*" (3:10 NASB): _____

"*intense heat*" (3:10 NASB): _____

"*disappear*" (3:10): _____

"*melt away*" (3:12): _____



CONQUERING THROUGH CONFLICT

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The Day of the Lord

2 Peter 3:7–13

The inferno Peter described is no ordinary forest fire. What makes God's fire like nothing anyone has ever seen?

Compare God's judgment by *water* in the flood of Noah's day with God's future judgment by *fire*. How are the two judgments similar and how are they different?

God will consume all the elements of creation to make way for "the new heavens and new earth he has promised" (3:13). Let's look closer at this glorious new day in the next section of our study.



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The Day of the Lord

2 Peter 3:7–13



Correlation: New Heavens and New Earth

What did Isaiah prophesy about the new heavens and earth in [Isaiah 65:17–19](#)?

How will this prophecy be fulfilled, according to [Revelation 21:1–7](#)?

Twice, Peter used the phrase, “looking forward,” regarding this wonderful new day in God’s plan for His people (2 Peter 3:12–13). Peter was so eager to see the new heavens and new earth! What about “a world filled with God’s righteousness” (3:13) are you looking forward to?

God waits patiently. His waiting is designed to get us in gear to make the message known.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



The Day of the Lord

2 Peter 3:7–13



Application: Our Marching Orders

The opening pages to Genesis unveil creation's origin and the beginning of humanity. Soon after, sin corrupted God's creation, and God launched His plan to redeem His beautiful handiwork. With the new heavens and new earth, the saga of Scripture comes full circle. All things, including humanity, will be remade according to its original design, only better. Jesus will sit enthroned and we will live under God's glorious blessing forever.

In light of this hope, how should we live?

First, let's *clean up* our lives, as Peter writes, "in holy conduct and godliness" (2 Peter 3:11). We can live today how we will live in eternity, in purity as God's children. How can Peter's glimpse into the future help you live purely today?

Second, let's *speak up* every chance we get because Christ's coming will not be delayed forever. God restrains final judgment while He lovingly calls lost sheep into His fold. "He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent" (2 Peter 3:9).

God patiently holds open the gate of salvation. Who is He waiting for in your circle of family and friends? How can you pray for these loved ones? What can you say to them?



The Day of the Lord

2 Peter 3:7–13

Third, let's *look up* in expectation of Christ's return when He will set right all wrongs and re-create the paradise we long for. How can the hope of God's new creation help you through your current trials, the loss of a loved one, or maybe a conflict in a relationship?

Just like the first readers of Peter's letter, our hearts resonate with Peter's song of hope. Eagerly and longingly, we pray with joyful anticipation: *Come, Lord Jesus!*



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, not a day goes by that I don't see another sign of corruption in our world. You must grieve how those You created have fled from You to embrace the ways of sin. I long to see Your righteousness fill this world and turn darkness to light. Shine Your goodness in my life so I may radiate Your light to others today. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on James, 1 & 2 Peter*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: 2015), 357.



CONQUERING THROUGH CONFLICT

A Study of 2 Peter

STUDY TEN

How to Live in Troubled Times

2 Peter 3:14–18

Peter was saying, “Tough times call for strong-minded saints. Don’t be caught unaware.”

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

CHRISTIANITY is not a sail-on-tranquil-seas religion. Whoever thinks that those who follow Christ cruise blissfully through life isn’t aware of what the Scriptures really teach.

The people who cast the longest shadows across the sacred text were courageous, tough-minded spiritual seafarers, slugging it out against overwhelming odds in the roughest storms. Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Esther, Ruth, David, Paul, and Peter were all stouthearted saints, able to persevere through hardship and remain faithful to the end.

Because tranquil times represent the exception rather than the rule, God’s Word focuses most on troubled times . . . telling us how to face them rather than trying to escape them.

Peter’s final words provide us with a case in point. Right down to the last verse in 2 Peter, he puts the truth before us in unmistakable terms meant to fill our sails with courage.



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How to Live in Troubled Times

2 Peter 3:14–18



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The Lord sends His followers into the world equipped with His Word and empowered with His Spirit. Pray for fortitude today.

Father, the way is difficult for me. The world is not kind to those who walk Your narrow way. And so, I depend on You today to fill me with courage to speak, strength to follow, and resolve to stay close to You. Help me to grow wiser and deeper in my faith as I study Your Word. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In our first *Searching the Scriptures* study, we illustrated the themes of 2 Peter as parts of an arrow. Three subjects comprise the feathers: warnings, reminders, and promises.

Peter *warned* about false teachers who “teach destructive heresies” (2 Peter 2:1), scam people out of their money (2:3), lure unstable souls into sin (2:14), and flaunt their “twisted sexual desires” (2:18). He warned scoffers who ridicule Christ’s return that judgment will come when the Lord comes suddenly to judge the ungodly and purge the earth with fire (3:7).

Peter *reminded* the believers to stand on the truths of Scripture—the words of the prophets, Christ, and the apostles (3:2). And then, Peter *promised* God’s power for godly living (1:3–4), and he assured them of God’s rescue from the coming judgment (2:9).

These warnings, reminders, and promises would be useless if not acted upon. So, the main shaft of Peter’s “arrow” is *diligence* in exhibiting godly qualities (1:5–10), grounding in the Word (1:19–21), and avoiding entanglements of sin (2:20). Finally, the tip is *hope*—the apostle’s vision of an eternity with God in the new heaven and new earth, “a world filled with God’s righteousness” (3:13).

Peter recapped these themes in the closing verses of 2 Peter—Peter’s final written words before he was martyred for his faith.



How to Live in Troubled Times

2 Peter 3:14–18



Observation: Strong Words for Handling Today

Use your skills of observation to overview [2 Peter 3:14–18](#). In this first reading, look for the overall themes—the warnings, reminders, promises, the exhortation to be diligent, and Peter’s concluding words of hope. Write down your initial impressions.

Now, let’s focus on the details of this passage, highlighting four central commands.

Be Diligent—2 Peter 3:14

What command do you see in [2 Peter 3:14](#)?

How does this command tie back to Peter’s exhortations in [1:5–7](#)?



CONQUERING THROUGH CONFLICT

A Study of 2 Peter

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2 Peter 3:14–18

“Be diligent” means to do your best. Do your very best to live in peace and without fault. We’d say to our kids, “Behave yourself.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Be Confident—2 Peter 3:15–16

Scoffers had shaken the believers’ confidence by casting doubt on Christ’s return. How did Peter build back their confidence in [2 Peter 3:15](#)? What is the purpose of Christ’s delay?

What did Peter accuse the false teachers of doing in [3:16](#)?

How does 3:15–16 mirror Peter’s message in [1:16, 19](#)?



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2 Peter 3:14–18

Be on Guard—2 Peter 3:17

Peter issued his primary warning in [2 Peter 3:17](#). What do you observe in this verse?

How does this command echo [1:10](#)?

The apostle was saying, “When you buy into error, your foundation gets shaky, and you lose your stability.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Grow—2 Peter 3:18

What do you see in Peter’s last written words: [2 Peter 3:18](#)?



How to Live in Troubled Times

2 Peter 3:14–18

How does this exhortation reflect his opening prayer in 2 Peter 1:2?

Grace and knowledge are to be kept in balance. Keep learning, but don't let learning outrun your grace. Also, stay full of grace, but don't let it lose knowledge.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Anchoring Ourselves to God and His Word

In the interpretation section, let's probe the meaning of two key Greek words Peter used. The first one, “distort,” is *streblōō* in Greek (2 Peter 3:16 NASB). This word appears only here in the New Testament, and Peter chose it intentionally to picture what false teachers do to the Word. Look up *streblōō* in Bill Mounce's online Greek dictionary at billmounce.com. Write down the vivid image this word conveys.



How to Live in Troubled Times

2 Peter 3:14–18

Peter said that if we follow these truth-stretchers, their errors will sweep us away. We will “lose [our] own secure footing” (3:17). The Greek word translated “secure footing” in Greek is *sterigmos*. This word also appears only here in the New Testament, and Peter again chose it intentionally. What does *sterigmos* mean?

What is the best way to keep our footing, according to Peter? To “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (3:18). The image is a strong tree with deep roots, broad limbs, and bountiful fruit.

How does *grace* balanced with *knowledge* produce a healthy, growing Christian? Name some characteristics of each quality and how they balance each other.

Grace will keep you tolerant. Knowledge will keep you strong. Grace will make you compassionate. Knowledge will make you discerning. Grace will help you smile. Knowledge will help you think. Grace will result in vulnerability. Knowledge will result in stability.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



How to Live in Troubled Times

2 Peter 3:14–18



Correlation: The Writings of Paul

In 2 Peter 3:15, Peter specifically acknowledged the divine inspiration of Paul's letters by connecting them to the "other parts of Scripture." This is no accident. Paul's letters were already circulating among the churches, and in his letter, Peter gave Paul's writings his apostolic stamp of authority.

Why was it vital to the growth of Christianity for Peter to authorize Paul's writings?

Read Paul's statement about the Scriptures in [2 Timothy 3:16](#). What confidence do you have in God's Word as your guide in life?

Whatever you hear, filter it through the Scriptures. Don't let your experience or your emotions be your guide. Let the Book be your guide. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



How to Live in Troubled Times

2 Peter 3:14–18



Application: Following Peter's Commands

How do you navigate your troubled times? The same way the early Christians did. First, *be diligent* “to be found living peaceful lives that are pure and blameless in his sight” (2 Peter 3:14). Take a review of your life lately. Are you at peace with God, living pure and blameless? What areas might need attention?

Second, *be confident* in the promises of Scripture. Do you hold fast to the Christian hope, patiently waiting for Christ's return? What difference might this hope make in how secure you feel?

Third, *be on guard* to “not be carried away by the errors” of wicked people (3:17). What impact does the false teaching by the scoffers of our day have on your heart? How can you find stability in the shifting currents of culture?



How to Live in Troubled Times

2 Peter 3:14–18

Fourth, grow in the “grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). The more you know Christ, the greater your experience of His grace—and the deeper the roots grow. How has your faith grown through grace and knowledge? Who in your life has benefited from your growing stronger? Who needs your strength today?

Peter stated his goal plainly: “to stir you up” (2 Peter 1:13 NASB). Has Peter accomplished his goal with you? Has he rattled your cage a bit? Maybe spurred you on to greater conviction or shook you awake to the dangers of false teaching? How about Peter’s amazing prophecy of end times? What part of Peter’s letter has stirred your soul the most?

Peter’s call to action is just as urgent in our world as it was when Peter wrote it. Fix your eyes on Christ. Guard yourself from error by rooting yourself in God’s Word. Live in anticipation of Christ’s return, and, with the principles you gleaned from 2 Peter, grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.



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A FINAL PRAYER

Father, may I grow in grace and knowledge. May Your Word be my bread and Your Spirit be my sustenance. I long to know You more. I look forward to Your appearing. I put my confidence in Your Son. Help me to share His truth with those I meet today. In Jesus' name, amen.



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