

ABIDE: A BIBLE READING CHALLENGE

JOURNEY THROUGH THE NEW TESTAMENT

NEW LETTER SAME TRUTH

2 PETER

In a careful reading of many of the New Testament writers, there is no doubt that you would notice a trend in the various topics as they were led of God to write. Among all of the controversies, struggles, and commendations God's people originally received from these men, a major topic that continually surfaced was the topic of heresy.

Paul, Peter, John, Jude, and the author of Hebrews, all wrote to God's people to warn them of the dangers of false teaching that existed and would continue to exist, to threaten God's people by undermining God's truth.

In this second letter that Peter writes, you can see that he is increasingly concerned with this, more than he had ever been. He was concerned about false teachers worming their way into congregations, and God's people needed to know how to defend themselves against the kinds of lies that would threaten their existence as a church.

However, that's not all you'll find in this letter. This second letter Peter writes has some of the most practical, but unique teachings in the entire New Testament. Aside from teaching these Christians how to defend themselves, they also needed a little bit of motivation. So Peter talks to them about the assurance a believer has because of salvation. He also tells them of the riches and promises a believer has because of Christ, and the characteristics a believer has because of their identification with Christ. And then, as Peter closes, he reminds his readers of their end-time prophecy.

At every turn, what Peter brings to the forefront of discussion in this second letter is exactly what Christians always need to hear. We always need to hear what God's power can do in our lives through Christ. We always need to hear about God's promises. We always need to hear that there are false teachers out there who would be more than happy to lead us away. And we always need to hear that one day God will return and right every wrong.

Peter's message is so practical that you would think we had just gotten this letter in the mail last week.

So let's do some digging and allow this old apostle of ages past to teach us what we need to know for our lives now.

How to Think About 2 Peter

Peter's second letter outlines itself very neatly into three major sections, marked by the beginning of each chapter.

Your Faith Needs Conviction (Chapter 1)— Peter does a little reminding right up front as he talks about all of the heavenly benefits that we have in Christ.

Grow in Your Walk (1:1-15): There are some wonderful verses right up front as Peter deals with our personal spiritual lives first. If you get your spiritual life right, then everything else just kind of falls into place. There are great phrases in these verses like, “add to your faith...”, “According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness...”, and “... give diligence to make your calling and election sure:” What Peter is telling you is that you need to grow in your walk of faith.

Grow in the Word (1:16-21): Peter makes the case that God’s Word can be trusted for your growth. He is giving you confidence that God’s Word has already been settled and that you can lean, with your whole weight, on every portion of Scripture provided to you. Grow in the word.

Your Faith Will Be Challenged (Chapter 2)— This is where Peter talks about those who try to deceive God’s people and challenge God by their false teaching. Peter also mentions the consequences of those who are taken in by these teachings. What we need to understand here is that the challenge to God’s Word is nothing new. Satan challenged God’s Word in the garden and is still challenging it even now.

Heretical Teaching (2:1-3a): In verse 1, we read these words, “... who privily shall bring in damnable heresies...” The word heresies literally means that there are people who bring in false teachings, and when they do, they set them right alongside everything else. But they’re not just any kind of false teachings; they’re false teachings that cause real damage. Peter calls them damnable heresies. The word damnable means that these teachings have a destroying function to them. They are vessels of utter destruction.

Heretical Trauma (2:3b-22): Peter explains here there is only one course of action for these kinds of teachings— destruction. They not only cause destruction but they themselves will be destroyed. Error always brings consequences. And so what Peter does is list out a few examples of how people giving in to error have suffered to the point of trauma and destruction in the past and makes the case that this will be the result every single time.

Your Faith Will Be Consummated (Chapter 3)— There will be a time when God will bring an end to every ounce of evil in this sin-cursed world— down to the last sin-cursed molecule.

Scoffers Will Be Silenced (3:1-12): Every time you hear someone say, “God has been saying he’s coming for a long time now. Where is He?” That’s a warning sign to you that shouts back, “The end is near!” Peter tells us that God is patient and wants as many in His kingdom as possible, but He will eventually pull the plug on redemptive history. When this happens, there won’t be scoffers anymore. God will make a believer out of everyone.

Saints Will Be Saved (3:13-18): God’s people on the other have a promise to look forward to— a promise of a new heaven and a new earth.

What to Look for in 2 Peter

Major Themes— The major themes largely follow the chapter outlines, but it’s important to remember, that for this letter, Peter has his eye on the glory of Christ as he presents this letter, and to miss these themes, is to miss entirely Peter’s purpose in writing.

A Reminder of Righteousness: You can see it, can’t you? Just take in those first words that make up the first verse of this letter, “Simon Peter, a servant of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 1:1)

Peter's purpose in writing lies right here. Reminding us that we have obtained a precious faith because of the righteousness of God, and Jesus Christ. That means you don't get to tamper with it. You don't get to discredit it. You don't get to water it down with something else. You don't get to do anything with it except to marvel at it after you have received it. Salvation is God's work; not ours. We are the recipients of the gift of salvation, but that's all.

A Defense of Scripture: Next Peter moves to his next major theme— giving validity to God's holy Word. We don't get to mess with this either. Because of God's great care in making sure that we have the right information, we should preach it, study it, love it, proclaim and obey it; but adding to it, taking from it, or ignoring it, are all completely out of the question.

A Warning of Heresy: Heresy. If it wasn't such a continuing problem from generation to generation, you wouldn't find it in God's Word. But it is a problem. It has been a problem since Genesis 3, and it will continually be a problem: so let's remind ourselves just one more time— God never tolerates heresy. This is why God's people need to be able defenders of God's Word. This is why God's people need to be open about teaching their children a Biblical worldview. This is why preachers and Bible teachers need to preach the whole counsel of God. Because there is always a high price to pay for trying to live life apart from the way that God wants it to be lived.

A Dose of Reality: Peter's final theme is one of ultimate resolution. Sometimes people are caught off guard in their life as they realize they were wrong. There was a time when when radioactivity was thought to be good for you. This led to product lines from radioactive anti-aging cream, to radioactive pendants, and radioactive water. There was a time when people thought that heroin cough syrup was a good idea (you're probably laughing right now just thinking about it). And we could find all kinds of things like that. We could find products, ideas, and therapies, that people thought were good, useful, and safe, but reality came along and told us how these thing really were.

This is Peter's point in his last major theme. There were people then, and there are people now who think everything is fine. They think they are safe. They think they're right. But one day, Peter says, reality will set in and they will find out that they couldn't have been more wrong. One day, Christ will come when everything sinful about this universe will be destroyed, and only God and His people will be left standing.

End Time Information— Some of the most stunning verses in all of the Bible, when it comes to what God will ultimately do in the future, are found right near the end of Peter's letter.

Let's look at 2 Peter 3:10, for a moment. "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up."

Let's take a look at a few of these words:

Noise: A great wind-type crashing sound.

Elements: This word is a little hard to understand in definition, but basically comes down to something like the "A, B, C's" of life. It has to do with a sequence of building blocks.

Melt: Break up and dissolve.

Fervent Heat: Burning, feverish fire.

If you put all of this together, you have the very description of what we know happens when there is a detonation of an atomic weapon. You might be thinking, how would Peter have all of this information? How did he know about the building blocks of

life, and what it would take for atoms to dissolve? Well, in addition to being a fisherman and a preacher, Peter was an atomic scientist! Actually, no, he was not at all. But he was an inspired writer of the New Testament and God, who has the future all written out, knows exactly what will happen in this world. I want you to know that your Bible is not even close to being irrelevant or out of date.

What to Gain from 2 Peter

Be Constantly Alert— Satan Attacks on Multiple Fronts. He attacks from the inside, from the outside; sideways, front ways, and always. This is another subject repeated over and over again in the Bible. There should never be a time when you're not looking out for a spiritual attack. Satan has his little special agents he sends into our churches. He has his little agents of false teachings who know how to cause trouble, and stir doubt. He knows how to play mind games and lead everyone not paying attention down a path toward compromise.

Peter, with the heart of a pastor, tells God's people about the dangers Biblical error can bring to God's people, and to never forget for one moment how easy it is to be disabled in your spiritual life.

Be Constantly Encouraged— Together, we could probably find all kinds of facts out there that could paint a terrible picture of the world today. If you want to highlight evil, you can find it. If you want to highlight sickness, death, and tragedy, you can find it. If you want to highlight people who are losing spiritual battles, you can find it. But as Peter both started this letter, and ended this letter, we find these two encouraging thoughts, God's people belong to God, and He will never let us go. And second, God will one day remove the curse of this world and create it to be completely and eternally new. And that is an encouraging thought.



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