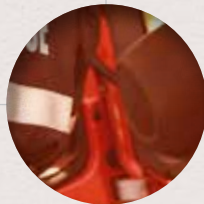
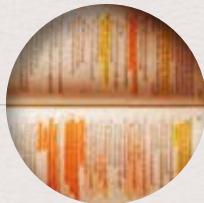


# 1,2 Peter & Jude



## EXPLORE THE BIBLE®

Adults • Personal Study Guide • Spring 2025 • CSB

## PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Life is filled with guidelines and instructions. For example, we use recipes to prepare some of our favorite dishes. The list of ingredients and step-by-step directions are designed to set us up for success. We have the freedom to leave something out or add something to the mix, but we do so at our own risk. The recipe is the surest way to success.

You're also probably familiar with the phrase "some assembly required." In fact, just reading those words may have caused your heart to skip a beat. As confusing as the instruction manual might be for building a child's toy or making sure "Tab A" fits into "Slot B" when putting furniture together, you'd be lost without the words and pictures on the page.

The world is filled with assignments to complete. We all have tasks that require our time and attention. While it might seem like a pain in the moment, following the instructions helps us put all the pieces into place.

The books of 1,2 Peter and Jude provide that kind of assistance for our lives. Living in a broken and fallen world, it can be tough to discern right from wrong. Putting everything together in a healthy and meaningful way can be a huge challenge. Peter and Jude understood that. Truth is, their readers were grappling with many of the same practical issues that we face today. That's what makes their words so powerful now, centuries after they were first written.

But even the best directions fall short if you don't start well. For 1,2 Peter and Jude, the starting point is a personal relationship with God through Jesus. That involves understanding how sin has wrecked your life and turning to Jesus to rescue you from the bondage that has held you down for so long. It's seeing your need and reaching out to Him. Then, you can move forward into the godly life He has planned for you. If you need to accept this salvation that only He can provide, here's what you must do . . .

- **Admit** to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning from your sin.
- **By faith receive** Jesus as God's Son and accept His gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross.
- **Confess** your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. You may pray a prayer similar to this as you call on God to save you: "Dear God, I know that You love me. I confess my sin and need of salvation. I turn away from my sin and place my faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord. In the name of Jesus I pray, amen."

After you have received Jesus Christ into your life, tell a pastor or another Christian about your decision. Show others your faith in Christ by asking for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith.

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\*Evangelistic Emphasis



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*Explore the Bible: Adult Personal Study Guide CSB* (ISSN 2330-9539; Item 005849951) is published quarterly by Lifeway Christian Resources, 200 Powell Place, Suite 100, Brentwood, TN 37027-7707, Ben Mandrell, President. © 2024 Lifeway Christian Resources.

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Explore the Bible  
Adult Personal Study Guide  
Spring 2025  
Volume 2, Number 3

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Printed in the United States  
of America

# FROM **THE TEAM LEADER**

When challenges arise, how do you typically respond? My ability to persevere was tested recently. I launched out onto a hiking trail with a friend prepared for 3.5 miles of moderate hiking. After almost two hours of steep inclines and barely visible signage, it was clear that we were not on our intended trail. We took numerous breaks, but we simply hadn't prepared for the trail length or incline changes. After almost four hours, the trailhead finally came into view. I struggled that day—moving forward amid uncertainty and difficulty. My stamina had been put to the test.

The messages of Peter and Jude offered encouragement to believers facing challenges to their faith. They exhorted their readers to be faithful to the Word they had received and to demonstrate their loyalty by pursuing godly living. Living faithfully while facing multiple challenges would not be easy. They would need stamina to stand firm. Like these early Christians, we are called to godly living. Perseverance and faithfulness will also be required of us. May this study encourage us as we follow Christ!

In Him,

**Amber Vaden**

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# WORD WISE

Terms listed here are identified in the Bible commentary with a dot (•).

**Cornerstone**—the stone laid at the corner of a structure that binds walls together and controls the design of the building. Used as a symbol of strength and prominence. In the Old Testament, it was used of rulers or leaders (Ps. 144:12; Zech. 10:4). In 1 Peter 2:6, the symbolism is used of Jesus, the only sure foundation of faith.

**Defense**—an answer, reply, or explanation; the Greek word *apologia* often referred to a legal defense. In broader contexts, believers are called to provide a thoughtful explanation of the gospel (1 Pet. 3:15).

**Elder**—In the New Testament, “elder” (*presbuteros*) refers to a leadership position in the church. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in churches on their missionary journey (Acts 14:23). Paul referred to them as overseeing and shepherding the church (20:28). In 1 Timothy 5:17 they engage in preaching and teaching; in James 5:14 they are involved in a healing ministry. Peter exhorts elders to shepherd the flock (1 Pet. 5:1-2).

**Holy**—to be set apart or separate; holiness is a characteristic unique to God’s nature (1 Pet. 1:16); it defines the “godness” of God; also describes any person, place or thing that is dedicated as God’s possession or for God’s use

**Hypocrisy**—a lack of genuineness; the word suggests playacting, insincerity, or pretense (1 Pet. 2:1). Jesus criticized hypocrites for being more interested in human praise than in God’s reward (Matt. 6:2,5,16), and for being judgmental of others’ faults while ignoring their own (7:1-5).

**Overseer**—Greek is *episkopos*; a guardian, keeper, protector, or superintendent; one charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly (1 Pet. 2:25)

**Slander**—speaking of people in a way that makes others think less of them; the defamation of one’s character; can also mean “backbiting” or “backstabbing” (1 Pet. 2:1,12)

**Sober-minded**—self-controlled, disciplined, or fully alert (1 Pet. 1:13; 4:7; 5:8)

**Submit**—the Greek word means to make oneself subject to another; to defer; to voluntarily yield to another’s authority (1 Pet. 2:13,16; 3:1)

**Zion**— in the Old Testament, a synonym for Jerusalem or its inhabitants; in 1 Peter 2:6 it refers to the church as the new place of God’s presence, His spiritual temple



# BIBLE READING PLAN

## MARCH

- ☐ 1. 1 Peter 1:1-2
- ☐ 2. 1 Peter 1:3-4
- ☐ 3. 1 Peter 1:5-7
- ☐ 4. 1 Peter 1:8-9
- ☐ 5. 1 Peter 1:10-11
- ☐ 6. 1 Peter 1:12
- ☐ 7. 1 Peter 1:13
- ☐ 8. 1 Peter 1:14
- ☐ 9. 1 Peter 1:15-16
- ☐ 10. 1 Peter 1:17
- ☐ 11. 1 Peter 1:18-19
- ☐ 12. 1 Peter 1:20-21
- ☐ 13. 1 Peter 1:22-23
- ☐ 14. 1 Peter 1:24-25
- ☐ 15. 1 Peter 2:1
- ☐ 16. 1 Peter 2:2-3
- ☐ 17. 1 Peter 2:4-5
- ☐ 18. 1 Peter 2:6
- ☐ 19. 1 Peter 2:7-8
- ☐ 20. 1 Peter 2:9
- ☐ 21. 1 Peter 2:10
- ☐ 22. 1 Peter 2:11-12
- ☐ 23. 1 Peter 2:13-14
- ☐ 24. 1 Peter 2:15
- ☐ 25. 1 Peter 2:16-17
- ☐ 26. 1 Peter 2:18
- ☐ 27. 1 Peter 2:19-20
- ☐ 28. 1 Peter 2:21
- ☐ 29. 1 Peter 2:22-23
- ☐ 30. 1 Peter 2:24-25
- ☐ 31. 1 Peter 3:1-2

## APRIL

- ☐ 1. 1 Peter 3:3-4
- ☐ 2. 1 Peter 3:5-6
- ☐ 3. 1 Peter 3:7
- ☐ 4. 1 Peter 3:8-9
- ☐ 5. 1 Peter 3:10-12
- ☐ 6. 1 Peter 3:13-14
- ☐ 7. 1 Peter 3:15-16
- ☐ 8. 1 Peter 3:17
- ☐ 9. 1 Peter 3:18-20
- ☐ 10. 1 Peter 3:21-22
- ☐ 11. 1 Peter 4:1-2
- ☐ 12. 1 Peter 4:3-4
- ☐ 13. 1 Peter 4:5-6
- ☐ 14. 1 Peter 4:7
- ☐ 15. 1 Peter 4:8
- ☐ 16. 1 Peter 4:9-10
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- ☐ 21. 1 Peter 4:17-18
- ☐ 22. 1 Peter 4:19
- ☐ 23. 1 Peter 5:1-4
- ☐ 24. 1 Peter 5:5
- ☐ 25. 1 Peter 5:6-7
- ☐ 26. 1 Peter 5:8-9
- ☐ 27. 1 Peter 5:10-11
- ☐ 28. 1 Peter 5:12-14
- ☐ 29. 2 Peter 1:1-2
- ☐ 30. 2 Peter 1:3-4

## MAY

- ☐ 1. 2 Peter 1:5-7
- ☐ 2. 2 Peter 1:8-9
- ☐ 3. 2 Peter 1:10-11
- ☐ 4. 2 Peter 1:12-15
- ☐ 5. 2 Peter 1:16
- ☐ 6. 2 Peter 1:17-18
- ☐ 7. 2 Peter 1:19
- ☐ 8. 2 Peter 1:20-21
- ☐ 9. 2 Peter 2:1-3
- ☐ 10. 2 Peter 2:4-11
- ☐ 11. 2 Peter 2:12-13
- ☐ 12. 2 Peter 2:14-16
- ☐ 13. 2 Peter 2:17-19
- ☐ 14. 2 Peter 2:20-22
- ☐ 15. 2 Peter 3:1-2
- ☐ 16. 2 Peter 3:3-7
- ☐ 17. 2 Peter 3:8
- ☐ 18. 2 Peter 3:9
- ☐ 19. 2 Peter 3:10-13
- ☐ 20. 2 Peter 3:14
- ☐ 21. 2 Peter 3:15-16
- ☐ 22. 2 Peter 3:17-18
- ☐ 23. Jude 1-2
- ☐ 24. Jude 3-4
- ☐ 25. Jude 5-7
- ☐ 26. Jude 8-11
- ☐ 27. Jude 12-13
- ☐ 28. Jude 14-16
- ☐ 29. Jude 17-19
- ☐ 30. Jude 20-23
- ☐ 31. Jude 24-25

# BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

The letters of Peter and Jude were among the latest of the epistles written in the New Testament, and they were written primarily to address suffering caused by persecution and to combat false teaching that arose in the church.

The writer of both First and Second Peter plainly identified himself as “Peter” and as an “apostle of Jesus Christ.” Second Peter 3:1 references an earlier letter, presumably 1 Peter, that he had written to his readers.

Jude identified himself as a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James. Most likely, this was a reference to James, the brother of Jesus, who became a leader in the Jerusalem church. Jude did not refer to himself as an apostle like Peter, meaning he probably was also a brother of Jesus. The similarities between Jude and 2 Peter indicate they had a common background and have similar dates of composition.

---

## KEY THEMES

These three books highlight several key themes, and they all relate to the presence of suffering and false teaching in the church.

### **Suffering affords Christians opportunities to deepen their hope and their walk with God.**

Nobody enjoys suffering. However, it does press believers to grow in maturity. Their suffering can propel them into a deeper relationship with God.

### **Persecution often follows proclamation of the Word of God.**

When Christians faithfully proclaim the Word of God and live for Him, they can expect the world to persecute them. Sometimes, this may come in the form of ridicule, scorn, or harassment. In some cases, it may involve physical abuse or death.

### **Spiritual growth is a natural outgrowth of genuine conversion.**

Those who have truly come to Christ will begin to grow in faith. They are not instantly perfect, but they will begin to progress toward godliness in their lives.

### **Christians must combat false teaching with the Word of God and holy lives.**

Our source of authority for doctrine is the Bible, but we must confront false teaching with lives that are in tune with the Lord.



# OUTLINE

## 1 PETER

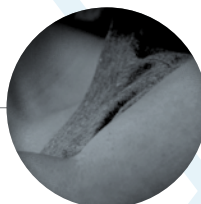
- I. Opening (1:1-2)
- II. Called to Salvation as Exiles (1:3-2:10)
- III. Living as Strangers in a Hostile World (2:11-4:11)
- IV. Persevering in Suffering (4:12-5:11)
- V. Concluding Words (5:12-14)

## 2 PETER

- I. Greeting (1:1-2)
- II. Building on Faith with Godly Qualities (1:2-11)
- III. The Apostle Peter's Testimony (1:12-21)
- IV. Warning Against False Teachers (2:1-22)
- V. Certainty of Christ's Return (3:1-10)
- VI. Christ's Return Impels Us to Holy Living (3:11-18)

## JUDE

- I. Greeting and Purpose (vv. 1-4)
- II. Description of the False Teachers (vv. 5-19)
- III. Exhortation to Faithfulness (vv. 20-23)
- IV. Doxology (vv. 24-25)





# Our Inheritance

*Believers have a living hope that strengthens our faith and brings glory to Christ.*

## 1 PETER 1:3-12

If we are honest, many of us struggle to keep hope alive. We hope of a better or more fulfilling job. We hope that a family member struggling with an illness will find help. We hope to have the finances to pay off student loans or make ends meet in retirement. Even those who walk with Christ sometimes find it a challenge to keep hope alive. Circumstances threaten to steal it. How do we keep hope alive when everything around us opposes it?



**What are some of the biggest detractors to hope in your life? How does it affect you when you lose hope?**

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# UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**


## **1 PETER 1:1-12**

The writer of 1 Peter is clearly stated as Peter, the apostle of Jesus (1 Pet. 1:1). As a former fisherman, Peter received a call from Jesus to follow Him and to fish for people (Matt. 4:18-20). This calling included many highlight moments but also some stumbles—like falling asleep in Gethsemane (26:40) and denying Jesus three times (26:75). Peter struggled at first with the expansion of the gospel to the Gentiles, but God gave him the vision of clean and unclean foods (Acts 10:9-16). To his credit, Peter spent his life serving and sharing Christ wherever he went, including Rome, where he died for his faith. According to tradition, Peter was crucified upside-down because he felt unworthy to die in the same manner as Jesus.

The apostle knew what it was like to hold on to hope, but he also knew what it was like to fall short of that hope. He wrote from experience rather than from an ivory tower.

Peter addressed his letter “to those chosen, living as exiles dispersed abroad in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Pet. 1:1). Looking at a map, these appear in the order of travel if one were to complete a circle around the region of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). The region covered about 129,000 square miles, a little smaller than the state of California.

Christians in Asia Minor faced persecution for their faith. Peter would refer to this on several occasions in the five chapters of 1 Peter (1:6-7; 2:18-20; 3:13-17; 4:1-4,12-19; 5:10). Paul had experienced persecution during his founding of the churches (Acts 14:5,19), and evidently that persecution continued as Peter wrote his epistle. Peter’s reference to Rome as Babylon in 1 Peter 5:13 probably indicates that he wrote as his life neared an end in Rome. The localized persecution in Asia Minor would soon turn to empire-wide persecution under Nero and the emperors that would follow him. The church faced some difficult days, but Peter wrote to keep hope alive in the hearts of the church.

 **Read 1 Peter 1:3-12 in your Bible. Circle all the certainties Peter mentioned in the passage that would keep hope alive in a believer’s life.**

# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## JOYOUS PRAISE (1 PET. 1:3-5)

<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead <sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you. <sup>5</sup> You are being guarded by God’s power through faith for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

### VERSES 3-4

To the Christians facing persecution in Asia Minor, Peter began his letter with a note of praise. Instead of focusing on the trials they faced, he turned their eyes toward *the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. The persecuted Christians needed something concrete to anchor their hopes, and Peter pointed them to the God who sent His Son into the world to redeem sinners. God did this *because of his great mercy*, not because of any merit in those who struggled to grip hope.

Peter reminded the persecuted believers that *through the resurrection of Jesus Christ* they received a *new birth*. Because they had been born again, they had *an inheritance . . . kept in heaven*. In the time of Abraham, *inheritance* often indicated the passing of land from one generation to the next. The New Testament understands it in terms of the final hope of believers to inherit a land that no one could ever take away, a home in heaven with the Lord.

Peter described the believer’s inheritance in three ways. First, it is *imperishable*, or death-proof. When we die, our hopes do not, if we have experienced the power of Christ’s resurrection in our lives. Second, the inheritance of believers is *undefiled*, or sin-proof. Sin will not taint our inheritance because it has no power to separate the believer from that inheritance. Third, Peter described the inheritance as *unfading*, or time-proof. Peter used this word in 1 Peter 5:4 to describe the “crown of glory” that would never fade.

The believer’s inheritance is being *kept in heaven*. The word for *kept* meant to guard or preserve. God is the One who protects our inheritance. Who is able to take it from Him? All these characteristics of our inheritance emphasize the eternity of salvation. For believers encountering persecution, these words must have created joyous praise.


**DID YOU KNOW?**

Many Bible scholars believe that at the time Peter wrote his first letter, persecution was not yet state sponsored or an official policy of the Roman Empire. The persecution his readers faced likely involved threats, discrimination, and mistreatment—including verbal abuse—by non-Christians.

**VERSE 5**

Expanding on the fact that a believer’s inheritance is kept in heaven, Peter explained that God ***guarded*** believers by His ***power***. Those who worried whether they had the strength to remain faithful in persecution had to realize it was not by their power or strength they remained true. *Guarded* was a military word that emphasized the protection of an asset. Guarding could be either active or passive (or both). God not only protects those who are His but also fights for them (Ex. 14:14; Isa. 54:17).

God protects the believer for a ***salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time***. Salvation involves justification, sanctification, and glorification. Though it begins with the new birth in Christ, God does not finish its work until the day Christ returns and we stand with Him. No matter what Peter’s readers faced, they could have confidence in the work of God in their lives. We can praise God for that same work in our lives.

 **How can our hope in Christ produce praise even when we are going through trials?**

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**KEY DOCTRINE:** *Salvation*

Glorification is the culmination of salvation and is the final blessed and abiding state of the redeemed. (See John 14:1-3; 1 John 3:2.)

## STRONG FAITH (1 PET. 1:6-9)

<sup>6</sup> You rejoice in this, even though now for a short time, if necessary, you suffer grief in various trials <sup>7</sup> so that the proven character of your faith—more valuable than gold which, though perishable, is refined by fire—may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. <sup>8</sup> Though you have not seen him, you love him; though not seeing him now, you believe in him, and you rejoice with inexpressible and glorious joy, <sup>9</sup> because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

### VERSES 6-7

When we consider our present trials in light of future glory, it produces joy. **Faith** is the key to turning trials into joy. Trials **now** are **for a short time**. Peter included the phrase, **if necessary**, to remind his readers that God could use their suffering to accomplish His purpose.

If God allows suffering in the lives of believers, what could its purpose be? Peter described suffering as a refining agent that builds a stronger **faith**. The expression **proven character** describes something that is genuine. Genuine **gold** goes through a refining process in which the furnace is heated to 1,900 degrees Fahrenheit. The heat causes the impurities to rise to the top, where a worker can skim them and remove them from the pure gold. This refining process produces the genuineness of the gold.

Peter contrasted genuine faith with genuine gold. Gold will not last forever because it is part of the current world order, but faith will endure. It will produce **praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ**. The persecuted believers could hope in the fact that the fruit of their faith would last forever. They may not have understood what God was doing at the time, but they could continue to trust Him and believe He was working all things for good (see Rom. 8:28).

### VERSES 8-9

Peter had seen Jesus face to face. Believers in Asia Minor had not but had seen Him by faith; they believed in Him. Seeing was not a requirement for believing. They believed that even in their suffering God was working His refinement process in them and preparing them for that day when they would see Jesus face to face. This gave them two things. First, it gave them **inexpressible** joy. Second, it gave them **glorious joy**. Though suffering was difficult, they could take hope that their suffering demonstrated the glory of God who sustained them.

The reason the believers in Asia Minor had such joy was that they were **receiving the goal of** their **faith**. This was something happening in the present tense. They put their faith in Christ, that faith was being tested, and God was using that test to refine them and to prepare them for a future date. Onward they marched toward the final goal of their faith—**the salvation of** their **souls**. By *souls* Peter referred to the entire person. God doesn't refine the soul and care little about other parts of one's personhood. He cares about the body, soul, and mind of every person. On the final day, God will complete His work of redemption, and the need for suffering as a refining process will be no more. Until then, the believers' faith guided them through times of suffering.

These verses remind us that suffering is not necessarily an indication of personal sin. While every human suffers, we can know that the suffering of believers has purpose.



How does our faith grow stronger through the trials we experience?

## **We can know that the suffering of believers has purpose.**

### **PROMISED ONE (1 PET. 1:10-12)**

<sup>10</sup> Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who prophesied about the grace that would come to you, searched and carefully investigated.

<sup>11</sup> They inquired into what time or what circumstances the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating when he testified in advance to the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. <sup>12</sup> It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you. These things have now been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—angels long to catch a glimpse of these things.

### **VERSE 10**

The Old Testament people of God did not have the opportunity to know and experience Jesus. However, they had the **prophets** who looked ahead to the **grace** that came in Christ. Even the prophets who spoke the



words did not completely understand what they had prophesied. They ***searched and carefully investigated*** the meaning of their prophecies. While the prophets spoke to their own time, they also anticipated a Messianic time they could not yet fully understand.

Peter reminded the believers in Asia Minor that what the prophets had spoken of was now a reality. The promise of grace belonged to them. God would see them through their suffering and lead them safely home to His presence.

***God would see them through their suffering and lead them safely home to His presence.***

#### **VERSE 11**

Because the prophets spoke both to their own time and to a future Messianic age, they tried to determine the ***time*** or ***circumstances*** that the Messiah would come. The reason they could predict such an era was that their prophecy came through the ***Spirit of Christ***. The same Holy Spirit who lived in the believers in Asia Minor also gave the prophecies of Christ's coming to the prophets.

Peter pointed to two things the prophets had prophesied about Christ. First, they foretold the ***sufferings of Christ***. The gospels record those sufferings in detail. Jesus experienced hatred, betrayal, abandonment, scourging, and crucifixion. Peter's readers were not alone in their suffering. Their Savior had also suffered greatly at the hands of those who opposed the kingdom of God. The prophets also foretold the ***glories that would follow***. The gospels also record the glory of the resurrection and the anticipation of the return and reign of Christ. For the glories to come, the sufferings had to occur. This same pattern of suffering and glory was the pattern of the first-century believers, and it is our pattern as well.

#### **VERSE 12**

The prophets ended up ***serving*** the suffering Christians with their predictions of the sufferings and glories of Christ. Peter accomplished the same purpose with the writing of his letter. Both encouraged those who were suffering to trust in Jesus to complete the work He started in them. The prophets ***preached the gospel*** to those who would follow them, inviting them to trust in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

Peter noted that even the angels *long to catch a glimpse of* that gospel message. While the angels marvel at the work of God in the gospel, they are not recipients of redemption. In contrast, humans experience the gospel in a personal way. All people need to understand and apply the gospel to their lives, especially during times of suffering.

● How is our knowledge of Jesus different from the prophets and angels?  
Why is that important to us?

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Use multiple Scripture passages to better understand how Christians respond to suffering for their faith.*

Peter wrote his first letter to encourage Christians in Asia Minor who were being persecuted for their faith. He spoke to the way that such suffering would position them to see God at work and also prove their character. Read the following Bible passages and take note of what they teach about the character and work of God in the midst of suffering. Note also how Christians should respond while suffering for their faith: Matthew 5:10-12,44; Acts 4:13-22; Romans 8:35-37; 2 Corinthians 12:10; James 1:2-4,12; and Revelation 3:11.

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# APPLY THE TEXT


- + We should praise God for the new life we’ve received through Christ.
- + We can be encouraged when we face trials knowing that faith is strengthened in difficult times.
- + Believers today benefit from the teachings of the prophets, but we also have a personal relationship with Christ.



**How can suffering activate hope in the lives of believers?**  
**What are some of the ways we can apply the gospel to our lives as we live for Christ in the midst of suffering? Discuss with your group ways you can support those enduring suffering.**




**What is your default action and attitude when you suffer?**  
**What promises of God do you turn to when you face suffering and difficulties? How can the sufferings you have experienced bring glory to Christ?**



**Memorize 1 Peter 1:5.**

## Prayer Needs



SCAN ME

**Explore the Bible Prayer Guide**

Scan here for a weekly prayer guide based on this quarter’s Bible passages.



# Our Mandate

*Believers are called to pursue holiness.*

## 1 PETER 1:13-25

People pursue things that are important to them. If it is fitness, they might get a gym membership or set the alarm early so they can get up and run. Likewise, a godly heart engages in godly pursuits. Because God is holy, He desires that those who follow Him walk in holiness. The pursuit of holiness is not always easy but is always a worthy pursuit. As the believers to whom Peter wrote faced persecution, they may have been tempted to compromise their faith. Peter encouraged them to pursue holiness.

 **What are you pursuing in life? Where would holiness rank in a list of your life's pursuits?**

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# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## 1 PETER 1:13-25

The people of God in the Old Testament had a remarkable view of holiness. God said to Moses, “Speak to the entire Israelite community and tell them: ‘Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy’ ” (Lev. 19:2). The Jewish understanding of God shaped their idea of holiness. The Jewish people believed that God’s holiness set Him apart as having no moral imperfections and frailties that were common to humankind (Hos. 11:9). His holiness gave Him the power to make promises and faithfully fulfill them (Ps. 22:3-5). His holiness also gave Him the right to expect holiness in His people.

The believers to whom Peter wrote included both Jews and Gentiles. The Jewish believers had a context to understand the holiness of God. But the Gentile believers did not have the same worldview. In the Greco-Roman world, the holiness of God was not understood. Their world contained the worship of many gods, some of whom competed with one another for supremacy in different regions of the world. These gods did not possess a nature of moral perfection, and they often acted like mere humans in their responses to the world. If the gods they had previously served were not holy, Gentile believers may not have the same desire to pursue holiness when it came to practical living.

Writing to both Jewish and Gentile believers, Peter issued a challenge which God had previously given to His people in Leviticus 19:1-2. He called them to live holy lives. This involved a lifelong pursuit of holiness, not a moment of instant perfection. As believers grew in their relationship with the Lord, their desire to pursue holiness would grow. This was a product of the redemption Christ had secured for them by His death on the cross.



**Read 1 Peter 1:13-25 and circle all of the phrases that define practical applications of what it means to live a holy life. How should having a relationship with Christ change our attitude toward holiness?**

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# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## HOLY (1 PET. 1:13-17)

<sup>13</sup> Therefore, with your minds ready for action, be sober-minded and set your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. <sup>14</sup> As obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires of your former ignorance. <sup>15</sup> But as the one who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; <sup>16</sup> for it is written, Be holy, because I am holy. <sup>17</sup> If you appeal to the Father who judges impartially according to each one's work, you are to conduct yourselves in reverence during your time living as strangers.

### VERSE 13

Peter previously described the benefits of salvation (vv. 3-12). With those benefits came the responsibility of preparing for the coming of Jesus. This preparation involved the pursuit of holiness. He encouraged them to be *ready for action* and *sober-minded*. These are physical and mental preparations for what is coming. Peter believed holiness was not only mental but also physical—not only being right but doing right. Like soldiers preparing to tuck their garment for battle or remaining alert for the movement of the enemy, the pursuit of holiness is an active pursuit.

The pursuit of holiness involved effort but was not a fleshly pursuit. Peter encouraged them to put their hope *completely on the grace* of God that was coming with the return of Jesus and the culmination of salvation. They had to exert effort in the present but with a hope toward the future. The *revelation of Jesus Christ* is the time of His return. We must pursue holiness, but we do so through the grace of God given to us and the hope that He will complete what is lacking in the end.

### KEY DOCTRINE: God

God is infinite in holiness and all other perfections.  
(See 1 Samuel 2:2; Isaiah 6:1-5.)

### VERSES 14-16


Believers do not pursue holiness to gain salvation. Rather, they do so *as obedient children*. Holiness is the pursuit of someone who has experienced new birth in Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:3). Though the old way

of life still tempts the child of God, new birth imparts a desire to pursue holiness rather than the ***desires of your former ignorance***. This phrase possibly indicates Peter wrote these words to Gentiles. He called the Christians in Asia Minor to not fall back into the patterns of life they followed before they came to Christ. All Christians face varying degrees of temptation to return to the things from which God delivered us.

Echoing Leviticus 19:2, Peter reminded his readers that God is **•*holy***. The standard of holiness is not our neighbor or any other person; the standard is God Himself. Since our calling is to holiness, we must work that calling into our ***conduct***. In other words, we are to live what we believe. In a world with shifting priorities and changing ethical standards, we must live in a way that reflects the holy God we serve.

**VERSE 17**

Right belief leads to right living, which results in ***reverence*** toward God. The fear of God, in turn, produces even more holiness. This is the cycle of holiness in our lives. As we ***appeal to the Father who judges impartially***, we can be sure that we have a fixed target of holiness. It is not moving based upon the whims of society or the darkened thoughts of fallen humanity. We cannot continue to call God *Father* and ignore the standards of His own holiness. No doubt, this is a struggle as we live as ***strangers*** in the world. The only other use of this Greek word in the New Testament is in Acts 13:17, where it described the exiles who lived in Egypt, a place that was not their permanent home. Likewise, this world is not the permanent home of Christians. We wait for an eternal home where God has dealt with the power and penalty of sin. Until then, we have the responsibility of pursuing holiness.

 What obstacles can we anticipate when we pursue holiness? Why is the pursuit of holiness a worthwhile pursuit?

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**REDEEMED (1 PET. 1:18-21)**

**<sup>18</sup> For you know that you were redeemed from your empty way of life inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, <sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of an unblemished and spotless lamb. <sup>20</sup> He was foreknown before the**



foundation of the world but was revealed in these last times for you.  
<sup>21</sup> Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

## VERSES 18-19

The pursuit of holiness has a starting point. Peter reminded his readers that they had been **redeemed**. This word connected well with people in the Greco-Roman world. Prisoners taken captive in war could be redeemed and set free, and the freedom of slaves could be purchased. The concept of redemption also has Old Testament roots, recalling Israel's liberation from Egypt (see Deut. 7:8; 15:15).

The **empty way of life** indicates that redemption brings something far better than what preceded it. This life of slavery to sin was **inherited from** their **ancestors**, making them both sinners by nature and by choice (Rom. 5:12).

The price of redemption for the believer was not **silver or gold** deposited in a pagan temple but **the precious blood of Christ**. The word *precious* described gems (1 Cor. 3:12) and fruit (Jas. 5:7), indicating that which was of rare or unusual quality. Indeed, the *blood of Christ* was that of **an unblemished and spotless lamb**. This phrase indicated both the sinless nature of Christ (Lev. 22:19-25) and His role as the sacrificial Lamb purchasing redemption (John 1:29). The blood of Christ has the power to cancel sin's debt and to turn our hearts toward God. The first thing happens instantly, while the second happens progressively. We are justified with God through faith in Jesus, but we are sanctified as we continue to grow in knowledge and apply our lives to the Lordship of Christ.

## VERSE 20

Peter described Christ as **foreknown before the foundation of the world**. Jesus was with God in the beginning, even before the creation of the world (John 1:1). He was not an afterthought or God's Plan B. Rather, before God created humankind and before Adam and Eve sinned, Jesus already existed. The death of Jesus was God's intended way of salvation before the law was ever given to Moses and before God ever called Abraham. Though people have not always understood God's plan for redemption through Jesus's death, God has written His story from the beginning pages of Genesis through Revelation.

Though Jesus existed prior to creation, God **revealed** Him **in these last times for you**. Even the timing of Jesus's incarnation was not an

accident, but it was in the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4). Peter and the other disciples saw Christ and had the blessing of witnessing the fulfillment of God's promise to send the Messiah, and the ageless plan of God had intersected with their lives.

***A belief in God that is not grounded in the death and resurrection of Christ is not a true belief in the God of Scripture.***

**VERSE 21**

By believing in **God**, Peter did not mean some vague acknowledgment of His existence but a belief in the resurrection of Christ **from the dead**. A belief in God that is not grounded in the death and resurrection of Christ is not a true belief in the God of Scripture. God gave Jesus **glory** by resurrecting Him from the dead, emphasizing that the payment for sin, which is death, could not hold Christ. Neither could it hold those redeemed by Him. This kind of **faith and hope** are anchored in God because this is the plan He established to redeem sinners unto Himself. By believing in the sacrificial death of Jesus and His glorious resurrection, we are showing reverence to God and are placed on the path to pursue holiness.

- Why did Jesus have to die for our sins? Why is it important that the death and resurrection of Jesus were God's plans even prior to the foundation of the world?

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**BROTHERLY LOVE (1 PET. 1:22-25)**

<sup>22</sup> Since you have purified yourselves by your obedience to the truth, so that you show sincere brotherly love for each other, from a pure heart love one another constantly, <sup>23</sup> because you have been born again—not of perishable seed but of imperishable—through the living and enduring word of God. <sup>24</sup> For All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like a flower of the grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, <sup>25</sup> but the word of the Lord endures forever. And this word is the gospel that was proclaimed to you.

## VERSES 22-23

The pursuit of holiness is not for our personal benefit alone. It encourages us to love others. Those who pursue holiness but do not have compassion for others often are caught in legalism. Those who love others without practicing holiness can resort to libertinism. Peter described the pursuit of holiness as being ***purified*** by ***obedience to the truth***. The purification process begins at conversion but continues through the process of sanctification. By coming to faith in Christ, believers are set apart from the way that the world treats people.

An outcome of the pursuit of holiness is a genuine love for fellow believers, or ***sincere brotherly love for each other***. The pursuit of holiness should leave one more loving and redemptive rather than harsh and judgmental. We, who have experienced the grace of God, must know how to extend grace to others, even when others fall short of our expectations.

***The pursuit of holiness should leave one more loving and redemptive rather than harsh and judgmental.***

Peter reminded his readers of their ***born again*** nature. They could not love in their own strength but only in the power of the new nature they received at conversion. New birth was like a seed that a farmer placed in the ground, except new birth is ***imperishable*** rather than ***perishable***. A seed planted in the ground is temporary, but the seed of salvation planted in believers is forever. How do we know that this seed is *imperishable*? We have the ***living and enduring word of God***. The *word of God* produces life that lasts for eternity.

In our own flesh it can be difficult to love others. When people fall into sin, it is easier to judge them than seek restoration. When they hurt us, it is easier to hurt them in return. As we pursue holiness in our own lives, we sometimes become more acutely aware of everything around us that is contrary to God's holy standard. But will we love lost people as holiness demands? Will we be patient, loving, and kind to other believers?


## VERSES 24-25

Peter quoted Isaiah 40:6-8 to illustrate the permanency of God's word. The passage in Isaiah was a comfort to the exiles in Babylon, assuring them that God would one day restore them to their land. He would show compassion to them by keeping His promises to return them to their land. ***Grass*** and flowers are beautiful while they last but are

only temporary. When winter comes, the *grass withers* and the *flower falls*. But the *word of the Lord endures forever*.

After the ministry of Isaiah, God’s people fell to Babylon, but God’s word remained unchanged. He had promised Abram that his descendants would bless all the other nations (Gen. 12:1-3). He also had promised David that his line would extend forever on the throne (2 Sam. 7:13). His word promised that He would relate to His children in love even when they did not deserve it.

As we pursue holiness, we will also learn to display love to our brothers and sisters in Christ, even when they may not earn it or deserve it. The pursuit of holiness results in brotherly love.

 **How does your relationship with Jesus influence your daily life? What effect does the Word of God have on your sanctification and brotherly love?**

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Dig deeper into the background and usage of key words or phrases.*

Focus on the phrase “Be holy, because I am holy” in 1 Peter 1:16. Read the following passages: Exodus 15:11; 19:4-6; Leviticus 20:26; Psalm 24:1-6; Isaiah 6:1-5; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; Hebrews 12:10,14; and Revelation 15:4. Then read the entry for “holy” in a Bible dictionary. Make notes of any findings that help you better understand the concept of holiness.

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# APPLY THE TEXT

- + Because God is holy, His people should also be holy.
  - + Believers can know they have been redeemed from an empty way of life through the blood of Jesus.
  - + Believers are called to love each other genuinely.
-  **What are some practical ways group members can pursue holiness individually? What are some ways that group members can support one another by pursuing holiness together? How can you create accountability in the pursuit of holiness?**


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-  **Why is it important that Peter connected the pursuit of holiness with the display of brotherly love? How can you find the proper balance between standing upon truth and loving others who may be struggling with that truth?**

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-  **Memorize 1 Peter 1:15-16.**

## Prayer Needs

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# Our Identity

*Because of the new life Christ gives, believers are God's own people who proclaim His praises.*

## 1 PETER 2:1-10

Home ownership is a blessing that carries with it responsibility. People can feel a sense of pride when they sign the paperwork and receive the keys to their new home. That sense of pride can turn to dread when the air conditioning breaks or the roof needs replacing. Those who embrace the blessing must also embrace the responsibility. Peter reminded believers that they have both the blessing and responsibility of living as God's own people.

- Name an example of a blessing that brings responsibility. How might ignoring the responsibility diminish the enjoyment of the blessing?

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# UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

## **1 PETER 2:1-10**

Peter reminded believers facing persecution that they had a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus (1 Pet. 1:3). He also challenged his readers to live holy lives (1:13-25). With that foundation in place, Peter encouraged them to press on to maturity in Christ. As persecution increased, their need for spiritual maturity also increased. Localized persecution would give way to empire-wide persecution, and the church needed a strong identity to survive the assault. The church needed a correct view of itself to survive the pressure from their culture either to abandon their faith or give up their lives. Peter described this correct understanding in 1 Peter 2:1-10.

Three images describe the type of maturity Peter hoped to witness. First, he used the image of a newborn baby, desiring the pure milk of its mother. He longed for the suffering Christians to seek their nourishment from a source that could truly satisfy and nourish them. Second, he used the image of a spiritual temple. He called on the believers to recognize that each of them was a living stone being built into a spiritual temple. The suffering church needed the power of community. Third, Peter reminded them that they were a holy priesthood, created by God to give praises to Him.

Peter urged these believers to live in the identity God had created for them. God had made them newborn babes who needed the pure milk. He had built the individual stones into a temple of praise. He had called them and set them apart as priests in His kingdom. Rather than creating their own identity and forging their own way, they needed to live in the identity God had already created for them. God asks the same of us.

 **Read 1 Peter 2:1-10 and underline the three images Peter used to describe the identity of suffering Christians. Read the passage again and circle those things that Peter asked believers to remove from their lives.**



# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## MATURE BELIEVERS (1 PET. 2:1-3)

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all slander. <sup>2</sup> Like newborn infants, desire the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow up into your salvation, <sup>3</sup> if you have tasted that the Lord is good.

### VERSE 1

Difficult times can cause people to treat others badly. Peter was writing to persecuted believers. He understood that hurting people sometimes hurt people, and spiritually immature believers are prone to mistreating one another. In these verses, Peter listed five attitudes and actions that have no place in the life of a believer.

First, they needed to rid themselves of **all malice**. The Greek word translated *malice* covers both attitudes and actions. It is the desire to inflict pain on someone. Christian maturity demands a godlier response.

The next two attitudes are closely related to one another—**deceit** and **hypocrisy**. *Deceit* is deliberate dishonesty, often for personal gain. *Hypocrisy* referred to an actor wearing a mask, playing the part of someone else in a play. It is pretending to be something you are not.

Peter also encouraged Christians to avoid **envy** and **slander**. *Envy* involved desiring what someone else possessed. Perhaps they envied those who did not experience suffering or the power that belonged to their persecutors. *Slander* involved speaking about someone with the intent to harm them or their reputation.

## Mature Christians long for God's Word.

### VERSES 2-3


The way to get rid of these negative attitudes is to **desire the pure milk of the word**. Spiritual maturity deepens as we spend time in the Word of God. Calling them **newborn infants** did not necessarily mean that Peter viewed the Christians of Asia Minor as immature. This is not necessarily the case. Rather, Peter hoped that the desire of suffering Christians would resemble a newborn baby's craving for milk. The emphasis is on the intensity of the desire. Mature believers have an intense desire for the pure milk of the Word of God. The apostle Paul chided the Corinthians

for settling for milk and not taking solid food (1 Cor. 3:2). But milk is the first taste of God’s Word and must be desired. Mature Christians long for God’s Word.

The milk of the Word is what allows believers to grow up into their **salvation**. A person who trusts Jesus for salvation is saved for all eternity. But believers must grow. This is the process of sanctification, and the Word of God sanctifies us (John 17:17).


Peter alluded to Psalm 34:8 by reminding his readers they had **tasted that the Lord is good**. Psalm 34:8 issued the invitation, “Taste and see that the LORD is good. How happy is the person who takes refuge in him!” The context of Psalm 34 also included the suffering of the righteous, which may be the reason that Peter used the passage. The Word of God reminds those who are suffering that God is good all the time.

In verse 1, Peter had charged believers with getting rid of unhealthy attitudes that would hinder the process of maturity. But removing bad attitudes is not enough. We must replace those attitudes with the thoughts and intents of Scripture. All believers need to view their circumstances in light of the goodness of God, who encourages us to continue progressing in maturity and to remain faithful even in suffering.

 How would you describe someone who is spiritually mature?

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 In diagnosing your spiritual fitness, which attitudes are hindering you and which are pressing you toward maturity?

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**LIVING STONES** (1 PET. 2:4-8)

**<sup>4</sup> As you come to him, a living stone—rejected by people but chosen and honored by God— <sup>5</sup> you yourselves, as living stones, a spiritual house, are being built to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. <sup>6</sup> For it stands in Scripture: See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and honored cornerstone, and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame. <sup>7</sup> So honor will come to you who believe; but for the unbelieving, The stone that the builders rejected—this one has become the cornerstone, <sup>8</sup> and A stone**

to stumble over, and a rock to trip over. They stumble because they disobey the word; they were destined for this.

#### VERSES 4-5

In these verses, the image used to describe maturity shifts from newborn babes to living stones built into a spiritual temple. Peter described Christ as the **living stone**. Though **rejected by people**, Jesus was **chosen and honored by God**. He was the foundation stone of the temple but not the only stone. God has chosen believers to be **living stones** that form a **spiritual house**. Peter's original readers were not solitary stones facing persecution. Rather, they were part of a community created by God.

Those who face suffering often feel alone or isolated. These verses remind us that it was never God's intent for believers to be lone rangers. Together, we are part of God's *spiritual house*. The church is the living temple built on the foundation of Jesus, and it will endure because its members are living stones built on the foundation of Jesus.

Verse 5 shifts images again. God's purpose was to establish a **holy priesthood**. As priests of God, all believers have access to His presence. Every believer also has a responsibility of serving God. Through the gifts God gives us, we worship and serve God in such a way to offer **spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God**. The ultimate physical sacrifice came **through Jesus Christ**, but spiritual sacrifices are the duty of each priest in God's holy priesthood.

**We should never confuse trials with the absence of God's presence or the thwarting of God's plan.**

#### VERSES 6-8

Peter quoted Isaiah 28:16 to remind his readers that Jesus is the **cornerstone** of the spiritual temple that God is building. By citing Isaiah, Peter reminded his readers that this was God's plan from the beginning, foretold by the prophets. **Zion** in Isaiah 28:16 relates to the new Jerusalem in the age to come.

Many who suffered in Asia Minor may have thought God had rejected them. Surely, they thought, He would not allow such hardship to affect His treasured people. However, their suffering followed the pattern of Jesus, who experienced intense physical and emotional pain. Yet God raised Him from the dead, not allowing those who despised Him to

win the day. We should never confuse trials with the absence of God’s presence or the thwarting of God’s plan.

Those who believe in Jesus will receive **honor** in spite of their suffering. But **unbelieving** people will face a different fate. In verses 7 and 8, Peter highlighted the two different fates of those who believe versus those who did not. Quoting Psalm 118:22, Peter demonstrated how Jesus was **the stone that the builders rejected** and yet **has become the cornerstone**. The picture is of workers in a quarry who discarded a stone, only to later realize that the rejected stone had become the chief cornerstone of the entire temple. In spite of people’s rejection of Jesus, God honored Him by raising Him from the dead and giving Him a name above every name (Phil. 2:9-10). If God honored Jesus, He will also honor Jesus’s followers even in their suffering.

Peter then alluded to Isaiah 8:14 to demonstrate that the disobedient stumbled over the stone that should have saved them. Christians should not fear those who persecute them; rather, they should feel sorrow that their persecutors had stumbled over the gospel of Christ.

**BIBLE SKILL:** *Examine how Old Testament passages are used in the New Testament.*

Using a study Bible or a Bible with robust cross-referencing, read through 1 and 2 Peter, making note of the Old Testament references and allusions. How did Peter use the Old Testament references to make his point? How does his use of the Old Testament inform our interpretation of the New Testament?

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Those who reject Jesus stumble for two reasons. First, they **disobey the word**. This could mean that they simply disbelieve or they actively rebel against the Scripture that points to Christ. Their intentional disregard for God’s Word caused their stumbling. Second, the ones who stumbled **were destined for this**. This passage emphasizes both

human responsibility and divine sovereignty. Peter indicted those who crucified Christ, even though the crucifixion was ordained by God (Acts 2:23). Both divine sovereignty and human responsibility are found in this passage as well. We cannot diminish either the role of human responsibility or divine sovereignty, even if we struggle to understand how they are both true.

 **What do we learn from the passage about our purpose as believers?**

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 **How does understanding our identity in Christ help us to mature in Christ?**

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**KEY DOCTRINE:** *God’s Purpose of Grace*

Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man, and comprehends all the means in connection with the end. (See Romans 10:9-15; Ephesians 1:4-5.)

**GOD’S PEOPLE** (1 PET. 2:9-10)

**<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.**

**VERSE 9**

Our identity as believers is found in Christ. In verse 9, Peter described the identity of Christians in four ways. First, we are a **chosen race**. All who believe in Christ belong to Him. God had chosen Israel without any merit of its own, and He chooses to save us today by His grace apart from our merit.


Peter also called believers a **royal priesthood** and a **holy nation**. At Sinai, God revealed to Moses that the Israelites were a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex. 19:6). Now Peter called all believers by these same identities. The church in Asia Minor experienced great persecution but also had a great identity.

Peter also called believers **a people for his possession**. The prophet Malachi had promised, “‘They will be mine,’ says the LORD of Armies, ‘my own possession on the day I am preparing. I will have compassion on them as a man has compassion on his son who serves him’” (Mal. 3:17). God’s people belong to Him. He will not abandon us in our suffering. He will safeguard those who are His possession, and they, in turn, will **proclaim the praises** of the God who called them **out of darkness** and into **his marvelous light**. The prophet Isaiah reminded God’s people that they were created to recount the Lord’s praises: “The people I formed for myself will declare my praise” (Isa. 43:21).

**Our identity as believers is found in Christ.**

**VERSE 10**

Alluding to Hosea 2:23, Peter remembered a time when the Gentiles **were not a people**. For the most part, Israel had rejected Jesus, the cornerstone, and God had created a new people made up of both Jews and Gentiles. All who believe in Christ have this new identity, **God’s people**. By the grace of God, all who trust in Jesus for salvation become part of God’s family and have **received mercy**. The Christians in Asia Minor who suffered persecution unjustly did not do so because God had turned His back on them. They were still God’s people and still recipients of His mercy, and God would glorify Himself through their suffering.

 Which picture of the Christian’s identity connects most with you? Why?


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# APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers grow in spiritual maturity through studying and applying God’s Word.
- + God calls believers to be His representatives in the world.
- + Believers are united corporately as God’s chosen and holy people.

 **What are some practical things your group could do to serve as Christ’s representatives in your community?**


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 **What are some of the evidences in your life that you are maturing spiritually? What spiritual disciplines are helping you to grow? To what disciplines do you need to give more attention?**

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 **Memorize 1 Peter 2:9.**

## *Prayer Needs*

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# Our Witness

*Believers' actions and attitudes are to bring glory to God.*

## 1 PETER 2:11-17,21-25

When a pickup truck pulled out on the street, a van coming down the road was forced to make a sudden stop to avoid hitting it. The driver of the van, visibly angry, exited his vehicle, approached the truck driver, and began to berate him with some very direct words. A passenger in the van was forced to physically restrain the van driver and direct him back into the van. Only after offering some additional parting words did the driver return to the church van he was driving.

● How might the actions and attitudes of some believers dishonor God and detract from His glory?

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# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## 1 PETER 2:11-25

Up to this point, 1 Peter has focused heavily on believers’ relationships to one another (1 Pet. 1:13–2:10). Now the focus shifts to the believer’s relationship with the unbelieving world (2:11-25). Asia Minor was an unreached area with many Jews and even more Gentiles. Many people in these places viewed faith in Christ with suspicion (Acts 14:8-28). When Paul traveled through Asia Minor, the community of Lystra took him outside the city and stoned him (14:19). So it’s not surprising that Peter addressed Christians in Asia Minor who were facing persecution of their own. The apostle expected much of those who experienced persecution. He expected that they walk in holiness and brotherly love (1 Pet. 1:13-25). He expected that they would grow and mature in the faith, understanding more of their identity in Christ (2:1-10).

Peter cared how believers dealt with sinful desires, because sinful attitudes and actions fed the fires of slander against them (v. 11). They were to model the attitude and actions of Christ toward those who persecuted them (v. 12). They were to submit to the governing authorities (vv. 13-17) and set an example in the way they related to the world (vv. 18-20). They could represent Christ well by adopting His attitude as they faced suffering (vv. 21-25).

Christ calls His followers to a counter-cultural lifestyle. It is not a lifestyle characterized by violence. Rather, in His kingdom, the meek, the poor in spirit, and the merciful are blessed (Matt. 5:1-10). Christians reflect Christ in the world in the way they treat people who are outside the faith. By our compassion and work ethic, we demonstrate the difference that believing in Christ makes in people’s lives.



**Read 1 Peter 2:11-25 and circle every direct command in the verses. In what ways are these commands different from what the world might expect?**

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# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## OUR GOOD WORKS (1 PET. 2:11-12)

<sup>11</sup> Dear friends, I urge you as strangers and exiles to abstain from sinful desires that wage war against the soul. <sup>12</sup> Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that when they slander you as evildoers, they will observe your good works and will glorify God on the day he visits.

### VERSE 11

Peter addressed the Christians to whom he was writing as **strangers and exiles**. Those believers suffering persecution were like a people without a home or a refugee without a nation. Paul wrote that “our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20). Our permanent home is heaven. We are like outcasts and strangers in a culture that opposes Jesus.

Peter encouraged these believers to **abstain from sinful desires**. The word *sinful* is the word often translated as “fleshly.” In spite of the fact that Christ has redeemed us from our old, fleshly nature, we still struggle with the impulses and desires that once ruled our lives. We have to make an intentional effort to abstain from those sinful impulses.

These desires **wage war against the soul**. The *soul* does not refer to a separate compartment in the human existence but the whole person. The fleshly desires from our past are not friendly or innocent desires. They have harm as their goal and enmity as their motivation. Like Satan, the enemy who came to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10), fleshly desires attack at the core of our being as children of God. The good news is that we can resist them through the power of the Holy Spirit.

### VERSE 12

Unbelievers often viewed Christians skeptically and with suspicion. In a climate of distrust, Christians needed to stand out by acting **honorably among the Gentiles**. Peter’s encouragement is reminiscent of Jesus’s teaching in the Sermon on the Mount: “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).

The persecution against Peter’s readers in Asia Minor began with **•slander**, or speaking against the Christians. Peter said **when** they slander you, not *if* they slander you. The unbelieving Gentiles accused them of disloyalty to the state, upsetting trade or divination (Acts 16:16-24; 19:23-34), upsetting the social norms about slavery (Gal. 3:20),

not participating in pagan festivals (Col. 2:16), and holding antisocial and atheistic values (Acts 15:29). Some of these things were true. They did not participate in pagan festivals, and they did upset some norms related to slavery. They also upset trade or divination. However, some of the accusations were slander. They were not disloyal to the state and were not antisocial.

Peter's hope was that as Gentiles slandered the Christians, they would notice their **good works**. Christians did much good in the world, and they certainly pointed others to the truth. Peter hoped that this would cause unbelievers to **glorify God on the day he visits**. Scholars have interpreted this phrase in two different ways. Some believe the *day he visits* is a reference to the return of Jesus, implying that one day unbelievers will see that Christians were right. The second interpretation views this phrase as the time of God's gracious visitation in saving people who currently oppose the gospel. Both interpretations are correct. Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord (Phil. 2:9-11). However, the second interpretation seems better suited to the passage. Peter believed that through the good works of believers, God would open the eyes of many of the unbelievers persecuting them, and they would begin to glorify the Lord because of His visitation to them. The witness of the suffering church constituted a powerful tool for reaching the world.



How should an understanding of a believer's true home influence his or her actions?

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## OUR FREEDOM (1 PET. 2:13-17)

<sup>13</sup> Submit to every human authority because of the Lord, whether to the emperor as the supreme authority <sup>14</sup> or to governors as those sent out by him to punish those who do what is evil and to praise those who do what is good. <sup>15</sup> For it is God's will that you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good. <sup>16</sup> Submit as free people, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but as God's slaves. <sup>17</sup> Honor everyone. Love the brothers and sisters. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

## VERSES 13-14

Following Jesus makes one a better, not worse, citizen. The New Testament consistently encourages believers to **submit** themselves to the authority of the government (Rom. 13:1,5; Titus 3:1). Christians should be subordinate and respectful toward those in authority. The same word used for the relationship between the citizen and the government described the relationship between church members and church leaders, husbands and wives, masters and slaves, and Christians and God (Eph. 5:21,24; Heb. 13:17; Jas. 4:7; 1 Pet. 3:1; 5:5). Submission to authority with the government did not mean blind obedience when the law of man opposed the law of God. Peter himself had said, “We must obey God rather than people” (Acts 5:29).

The basis of submission appears in the phrase **because of the Lord**. The sovereign God provided humankind with a structure of **human authority**, and as long as that authority did not oppose the clearly revealed Word of God, He expected His followers to submit. God causes kingdoms to rise and fall (Ps. 75:7; Dan. 2:21). The Bible contains examples of situations that justified civil disobedience. For example, the Hebrew midwives allowed the male children to live even after Pharaoh demanded they kill them (Ex. 1:17). Rahab refused to expose the Jewish spies who hid in her home in Jericho (Josh. 2:4). Saul’s followers refused to take Jonathan’s life for violating Saul’s command (1 Sam. 14:45). All of these instances related to the sanctity of human life, because God created them in His image.

Governments not only provided rules that ordered society but also would **punish those who do what is evil**. They bore the responsibility of maintaining law and order in society. Governments also should **praise those who do what is good**. They have a responsibility of ordering society in a way to reward good behavior.


## VERSES 15-17

People who are falsely accused may attempt to stop the slanderous accusations in several ways. They may defend themselves verbally, return slander with slander, or do what this verse prescribes. By **doing good**, Christians disprove the slanderous accusations of others. Their restraint and submission to authority would **silence the ignorance of foolish people**. Sometimes the persecuted need to hear that they are on the side of truth. Peter clearly stated that their stand for righteousness was **God’s will**.

The believers in Asia Minor were free and slaves at the same time. Peter encouraged them to **submit as free people**. Their submission to governmental authorities did not remove their freedom in Christ. No political organization can remove spiritual freedom. The believers had received redemption through the blood of Christ, and He had set them free from the “empty way of life inherited” from their fathers (1 Pet. 1:18). They could submit to the authorities without surrendering their own freedom.

Even though Christians had freedom in Christ, they did not have the right to use it as a **cover-up for evil**. Christian freedom is not an escape from servitude to others but involves a change of masters. Christians needed to submit to authorities, but they did so as **God’s slaves**. They lived responsibly with the Lord as their master, and in doing so, they used their freedom to bring glory to God.

Peter summarized this section with four rapid-fire commands. Each of the commands deals with the way Christians are to treat others. First, he said to **honor everyone**. Not everyone earns our respect, but everyone needs it. Christians owe a debt of proper respect to people around them, as God created all in His image (Gen. 1:26). Second, Peter instructed Christians to **love the brothers and sisters**. He emphasized the importance of loving all of those who share the same Father. Love for fellow believers also speaks volumes when those outside the faith witness it. Third, Peter encouraged Christians to **fear God**. Christians not only should honor God (1 Pet. 1:3,8; 2:5,9), but they also should fear Him. This level of respect separated Him from the governmental authorities mentioned in the passage. This distinction became apparent in the final command to **honor the emperor**. Christians should *honor* the emperor but *fear* God. Ironically, Peter put the emperor on the same level as everyone but not on the level of God.



**Why is it important for Christ followers to honor human authorities?**

**What principles should a person display when obeying government conflicts with the Word of God?**

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**KEY DOCTRINE:** *Religious Liberty*

Civil government being ordained of God, it is the duty of Christians to render loyal obedience thereto in all things not contrary to the revealed will of God. (See Romans 13:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-2.)

**OUR EXAMPLE** (1 PET. 2:21-25)

<sup>21</sup> For you were called to this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. <sup>22</sup> He did not commit sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth; <sup>23</sup> when he was insulted, he did not insult in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten but entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. <sup>24</sup> He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree; so that, having died to sins, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. <sup>25</sup> For you were like sheep going astray, but you have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

**VERSES 21-23**

Peter pointed to the example of *Christ*. The words *called to this* referred to suffering in general. God called the believers to endure suffering. Jesus left them *an example to follow*. The word *example* was used of children who traced over letters of the alphabet in order to write them properly. By tracing over the example of Christ's suffering, Christians could learn how to remain faithful even as God called them to suffer.

The preeminent passage in the prophets about the suffering of Jesus appears in Isaiah 53. Peter quoted Isaiah 53:9—*and no deceit was found in his mouth*—to demonstrate Jesus's response to suffering. Jesus always approached suffering by doing the right thing. When *insulted*, He did not respond in vengeance. He *entrusted himself to the one who judges justly*. He responded correctly and left it to His Father to judge those who treated Him wrongly. Jesus experienced the insults of others throughout His earthly ministry (Matt. 11:19; 26:67; 27:30,39-44; Mark 3:22), yet He never responded in word or action in a way that would demean those who opposed Him. Trusting God with the way we respond to those who oppose us is not easy, but it is necessary.

**VERSES 24-25**

Why did Jesus not insult those who insulted Him? Peter explained that Christ *bore our sins in his body*. Jesus had no sin, but He took upon Himself the sins of others as He innocently went to the cross. Had he



hurled insults back at those who insulted Him, He could not have innocently suffered for the guilty. This opened the way for the great exchange—Jesus died the death we deserved so that we could live the life that He deserved.

Returning to Isaiah 53 for the example of how Jesus faced suffering, Peter quoted Isaiah 53:5-6. **By his wounds**, Jesus has brought healing to those enslaved by sin, **like sheep going astray**. He was the **Shepherd and •Overseer** of their souls. Jesus embraced not only the authoritative role as their leader, but He also treated them with the concern and care of a pastor.

● How can believers follow Christ’s example when facing persecution?

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● How is Jesus more than just a good example in helping us through suffering?

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Memorize a verse and apply it to a real-life situation.*

Memorize Isaiah 53:6 in your preferred Bible translation. Then write the verse in your own words. Finally, write a couple of sentences here or in a journal, stating how the verse can affirm not only your forgiveness in Christ, but the power to live the righteous life Peter speaks of.

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# APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers bring glory to God by living holy and honorable lives.
- + Believers are to use their freedom to serve God.
- + Believers are to follow Christ’s example in the face of unjust suffering.

○ **With your Bible study group, discuss how your relationship with God influences how you relate to human authorities. Based on this week’s Bible passage, how should you be praying for persecuted believers around the world?**

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○ **Why is it important for you to pattern the way you respond to criticism after Christ? Why is Jesus’s way a better way? How can your life bring glory to God this week?**

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○ **Memorize 1 Peter 2:16.**

## Prayer Needs

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# Our Relationships

*Believers live out their faith in the context of relationships.*

## 1 PETER 3:1-12

An exasperated church member once exclaimed that church would be great if it wasn't for the people! Perhaps a husband or wife has felt that marriage would be great if it wasn't for his or her spouse. Both exclamations are irrational. Both church and marriage involve relationships. Believers must live out their faith in the context of relationships. This requires that we learn how to resolve conflict and deepen our relationships so we can live in the way God intended—for our good and for His glory.



What are some reasons you get frustrated with people?

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# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## 1 PETER 3:1-12

Those who read this week’s Bible passage may wonder why Peter would address wives in six verses and husbands in only one verse. First, verse divisions did not exist in his original writing. Second, his content to wives occurred in the context of a patriarchal society where males had dominance over females. Peter did not endorse that system any more than he endorsed the slave-master relationship (1 Pet. 2:18-20). His concern in writing was to help those living in situations where they had less power than those who might oppress them. In teaching slaves how to submit to their masters and wives how to submit to their husbands, Peter actually advanced the case against injustice in society.

Christianity had spread first among the lower classes of Greco-Roman society, though it did not exclude people of wealth. Therefore, many who were born into the class of the weaker power had to learn how to relate to others around them in a way that would advance the gospel and bring glory to God.

Peter’s goal in his letter was not to start a revolution in society but to instruct people how to live in right relationships. Not all people came into relationships with the same level of authority, but all had an obligation to treat others well. Peter told wives how to behave toward their unbelieving husbands (3:1-6). He instructed believing husbands how to behave toward their wives, some of whom may not have known the Lord (3:7). Finally, he described how all believers should treat others, especially those who were outside the faith (3:8-12). The gospel spread on the wings of relationships, and Christians needed to intentionally develop those relationships in ways that the gospel was winsome to those who did not believe in Christ.



**Read 1 Peter 3:1-12. Highlight each command, then identify the reason for the command.**

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# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## WIVES (1 PET. 3:1-6)

<sup>1</sup> In the same way, wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, even if some disobey the word, they may be won over without a word by the way their wives live <sup>2</sup> when they observe your pure, reverent lives. <sup>3</sup> Don't let your beauty consist of outward things like elaborate hairstyles and wearing gold jewelry or fine clothes, <sup>4</sup> but rather what is inside the heart—the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. <sup>5</sup> For in the past, the holy women who put their hope in God also adorned themselves in this way, submitting to their own husbands, <sup>6</sup> just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. You have become her children when you do what is good and do not fear any intimidation.

### VERSES 1-2

Peter called on wives to live the kind of godly lives that would draw their husbands to the gospel, not push them away from it. Through their lives and testimonies, wives have an opportunity to see their husbands come to Christ.

The fact that a woman would adopt a religion contrary to her husband violated Greco-Roman ideals. Her conversion to Christ in itself may have caused tension. But if her faith caused her to rebel against all of the established practices of her time, it certainly would not help her husband investigate the claims of the gospel. For this reason, Peter encouraged wives to **•submit** to their husbands, ***even if some disobey the word.*** They could not expect unbelieving husbands to live in obedience to the Word of God.

Submission did not imply inferiority, nor did it encourage wives to participate in sinful activities or remain in threatening situations. As much as possible, the wife was to voluntarily submit to the authority of her husband for the purpose of leading him to Christ.

Actions would speak louder than words; their husbands would be ***won over without a word.*** Being in a societal position with little power, her words could make the husband defensive. But who could argue against submissive actions? The husband would be influenced more by her behavior than by her words.

The basis of submission was a ***pure*** and ***reverent*** life. As the husband saw the purity and devotion of his wife, he would take notice.

## VERSES 3-4

The main focus of a godly wife was not **beauty** that consisted in **outward things like elaborate hairstyles and gold jewelry or fine clothes**. Peter did not prohibit outward adornments but encouraged a proper sense of values concerning them. Our world obsesses over outward beauty. Peter urged us to look deeper for beauty.

The apostle encouraged wives who had unbelieving husbands to look **inside the heart**. What the woman is on the inside determines whether she is truly beautiful. No amount of outward adornments can overcome a decadent heart.

A **gentle** spirit is not a quality reserved only for women. In Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, He encouraged His followers to be humble, the same word used here (Matt. 5:5). In this context, it refers to a person who does not insist on her own rights. This same idea of submission was for all Christians, not just wives relating to their husbands (Eph. 5:21). Peter also encouraged a **quiet spirit**. If she were argumentative or constantly criticizing the husband for his lack of faith in Christ, it would have the opposite effect of leading him to Christ.

**No amount of outward adornments can  
overcome a decadent heart.**

## VERSES 5-6

To illustrate his point, Peter turned to a holy woman of the past. He described how Sarah **obeyed Abraham, calling him lord**. The term *lord* was a respectful form of address, similar to “sir” today. Peter's point was that Sarah addressed her husband respectfully. She adorned herself with the qualities of a “gentle and quiet spirit” (v. 4). Sarah became the mother of the Hebrew people under the old covenant, and those who **do what is good**, and **do not fear any intimidation** became her daughters. The reminder to *do what is good* would be a reminder to Peter's readers that not all Sarah's actions were good. They needed to follow her example in the areas where she acted rightly. Sarah had developed the plan for Abraham to have children by her handmaiden (Gen. 16:3). The result of her decision to give Hagar to Abraham resulted in intimidation (16:5). She despised Hagar because she felt intimidated that she had given Abraham a son in Ishmael. Wives whose husbands were not Christians had an opportunity to do the right thing in the right way.



How does a wife's role in marriage reflect her relationship with God?  
What approaches should a wife take toward her unbelieving husband?

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## HUSBANDS (1 PET. 3:7)

<sup>7</sup> **Husbands, in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker partner, showing them honor as coheirs of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.**

### VERSE 7

By using the expression, *in the same way*, Peter tied together the instructions to wives and husbands. **Husbands** needed to live with their wives *in an understanding way*. Even though he may have had authority over her in a patriarchal society, it did not give him the right to treat her however he wanted. He was bound to his understanding of God's ways and God's Word.

Peter reminded husbands that their wives were the *weaker partner*. What did he mean by this? Certainly he did not suggest that they were weak morally or spiritually. God created both male and female in His image (Gen. 1:27), and He showed no partiality between them (Gal. 3:28). Peter could have meant that females were weaker physically, but that is not universally true. If this were his intention, then he wanted to prevent the male from taking advantage of the female because of his greater physical strength. More likely, Peter meant that the woman was in a weaker position than the male in society. She held a more vulnerable position, and the husband had no right to use that to his advantage. This interpretation seems best because of the instructions that follow.

Peter encouraged husbands to show their wives *honor as coheirs of the grace of life*. Movers take more care with a mirror than with a mattress. In the same way, husbands needed to value their wives in such a way that they would care for their needs. Husbands and wives were both coheirs of God's grace. In His eyes, neither of them had an advantage. This would have challenged some of the thoughts of society in Asia Minor, but it would also lead to greater harmony in the home.

In a stunning statement, Peter revealed that the husband's treatment of his wife affected his *prayers*. To be right with God, the husband needed to be right with his wife. What are *hindered* prayers? A husband who refuses to treat his wife with respect and honor makes himself unfit



to pray and probably has little desire to pray. Spiritual health requires healthy relationships with others, especially one's own spouse.

Why are husbands called to honor their wives?

How can a husband do that in practical ways?

**KEY DOCTRINE:** *The Family*

The husband and wife are of equal worth before God, since both are created in God's image. (See Genesis 1:26-28; Matthew 19:3-9.)

**ALL BELIEVERS** (1 PET. 3:8-12)

<sup>8</sup> Finally, all of you be like-minded and sympathetic, love one another, and be compassionate and humble, <sup>9</sup> not paying back evil for evil or insult for insult but, on the contrary, giving a blessing, since you were called for this, so that you may inherit a blessing. <sup>10</sup> For the one who wants to love life and to see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit, <sup>11</sup> and let him turn away from evil and do what is good. Let him seek peace and pursue it, <sup>12</sup> because the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do what is evil.

**VERSES 8-9**

Peter previously discussed the relationship between slaves and masters (1 Pet. 2:18-20) and husbands and wives (3:1-7). He summarized by indicating that certain principles exist by which we should treat all people. First, he told them to be **like-minded and sympathetic**. *Like-minded* literally means to think the same thing. This involves unity rather than unanimity.

Peter repeated the command of Jesus to **love one another** (John 13:34). Genuine love moves us to **compassionate** action when people

we love fall short. Love also causes us to be **humble**. Humility causes believers to place the needs of others ahead of their own. Relationships thrive when love, compassion, and humility guide them. They fail when disinterest, judgmental attitudes, and arrogance guide them.

The inward attitudes of humility, love, and compassion express themselves outwardly in the way we treat people. Compassionate and humble behavior does not pay back **evil for evil**. The law required an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth (Lev. 24:17-22). Jesus revealed that Kingdom values were different. Those who have experienced grace turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:38-39). Love goes beyond the law. Passing **insult for insult** may give us a measure of emotional satisfaction, but it is not the way of Christ.

Rather than hurting others with our actions, we should give a **blessing** to those who treat us badly. Proverbs 25:21-22 says we are to treat our enemies well. By doing so, “you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you.” Revenge may best be served cold, but it also causes frostbite in relationships. We can give a blessing to others by praying for them, serving them, and forgiving them when they have wronged us.

**Believers must be more dedicated to pursuing peace than to winning a victory over others; peace is the victory.**

## VERSES 10-12

Peter alluded to Psalm 34:12-16 as a guide in how we are to treat others. Like the psalmist, he encouraged his readers to guard their **lips**. Loose lips rob people of their **love for life** and **good days**. That is difficult for those treated unfairly but it is not impossible. The psalmist also encouraged the persecuted to **turn away from evil** and **do what is good**. The choice is clear. Christians can grow bitter and work for the demise of others, or they can bless them and bring peace to themselves and hopefully to others. Finally, the psalmist encouraged the persecuted to **seek peace and pursue it**. Believers must be more dedicated to pursuing peace than to winning a victory over others; peace is the victory.


Verse 12 delivers the powerful reason Christians should follow the psalmist’s guide to treating others. God’s **eyes** are always on us and His **ears** always hear us. He opposes all who do **evil**. God sees what we do

and He knows our heart. We are not responsible for what others do to us, but we are responsible for our response.

 **Why is the instruction to demonstrate love and humility vital to the local church?**

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 **How should you respond when others do not treat you well?**

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Use other Scripture to help understand a Bible passage.*

Submission is a consistent theme throughout 1 Peter 2:11–3:12. It’s applied generally to all relationships and specifically to wives in relationship to their husbands. Compare and contrast Peter’s discussion on marital submission alongside Paul’s in Ephesians 5:22-33. What do you glean about the importance of submission as a Christian quality? Why might a wife’s submission to her husband actually put her into a uniquely powerful position to glorify God and proclaim the work of Jesus?

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# APPLY THE TEXT

- + Wives are to submit to their husbands and live pure and reverent lives.
- + Husbands are to honor their wives as fellow believers.
- + Believers are to demonstrate love, compassion, and humility toward one another.

 **What actions can your Bible study group take to strengthen the marriages in the group? Are there ways you can support those who are not married?**

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 **Evaluate the relationships in your life. Of the six characteristics of relationships Peter listed in 3:8-9, at which are you strongest? Which give you the greatest challenge? What can you do to strengthen your weakest area?**

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 **Memorize 1 Peter 3:8-9.**

## Prayer Needs

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# Our Defense

*Believers can share the reason for our hope even in the midst of suffering.*

## 1 PETER 3:13-22

People sometimes refer to the first hour after a medical or tragic disaster as the golden hour. At that moment, hope is at its highest. As time passes, hope diminishes. Medical responders and emergency responders work furiously because of that hope. On the other side of the equation, those who have experienced the emergency sometimes struggle to keep hope alive. As believers, we have a solid reason for hope even in the midst of suffering.

- What can cause someone to lose hope in a difficult circumstance?
- What factors can help a person find hope even in desperate situations?

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# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT


## 1 PETER 3:13-22

The suffering of believers in Asia Minor was never far from Peter’s mind (1 Pet. 1:6; 2:12,15,19; 3:1,9). In this week’s passage, the subject returns to encouragement for the Christians facing persecution.

Believers needed to be ready to defend their faith before their persecutors (3:13-17). Instead of cowering in fear, they needed to present a case for the hope that sustained them. Peter also encouraged them to anchor their hope in the death and resurrection of Christ (3:18-20). Theirs was not an empty hope. They could be confident that Christ’s death and resurrection was enough to either sustain them in persecution or lead them home in death. Such calm would also speak clearly to those who persecuted them.

Jesus had warned His followers that they would face persecution. He said in the Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs. You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me. Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matt. 5:10-12). In the last week of His life, Jesus told His followers, “You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world” (John 16:33).

The apostle Paul also explained a theology of suffering (2 Cor. 4:17; 11:23-30; 12:7-10; Phil. 4:11-12). In Colossians 1:24 Paul said, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for you, and I am completing in my flesh what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for his body, that is, the church.” There was nothing lacking in Christ’s atoning work, but the church still faced many opportunities to suffer for Christ and press His mission forward. Suffering fills the pages of Scripture, but believers have a living hope in that suffering.

 **Read 1 Peter 3:13-22, noting the times suffering is mentioned. What is the difference between undeserved suffering and suffering we bring upon ourselves? What kind of suffering is this passage talking about?**

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# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## BE READY (1 PET. 3:13-17)

<sup>13</sup> Who then will harm you if you are devoted to what is good? <sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed. Do not fear them or be intimidated, <sup>15</sup> but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. <sup>16</sup> Yet do this with gentleness and reverence, keeping a clear conscience, so that when you are accused, those who disparage your good conduct in Christ will be put to shame. <sup>17</sup> For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

### VERSES 13-16

Peter began his discussion with an interesting question. He asked who would *harm* them if they were *devoted to what is good*. One might expect the answer to be that nobody would hurt a person who was trying to do the right thing. But people in Asia Minor were targeting Christians who were trying to live the way God wanted them to live. Peter did not ask the question because he expected an answer. He asked it to point to the innocence of the Christians who suffered at the hands of others.

***Many think the blessed people are the ones with the fewest problems or the most possessions.***

Suffering for doing the right thing happened all the time in Peter's world—and in ours too. Nevertheless, those who *suffer for righteousness* would be *blessed*. Many think the blessed people are the ones with the fewest problems or the most possessions. But the Bible describes the blessed as those who have the favor of God on their lives (Matt. 5:3-12), even when those circumstances may not be ideal.

In the latter part of verse 14, Peter alluded to Isaiah 8:12-13. Isaiah's audience, Judah, experienced threats from Israel and Aram. Those nations wanted to remove Judah's king and place their own puppet king on the throne. Though the nation trembled in terror, Isaiah promised that God would protect them from those who threatened them. Likewise, Peter told believers to *not fear them*. They did not even need to be *intimidated*. This word meant to be shaken, frightened, or disturbed.



Rather than cowering in fear, they needed to **regard Christ the Lord as holy** in their **hearts**. This was an acknowledgment that God, not the persecutors, ruled the world. His sovereignty superseded the evil plans of those persecuting Christians. Though at the time suffering seemed difficult, God’s plan would prevail over those who tried to usurp His authority.

What does it mean to *regard Christ the Lord as holy*? We cannot make Him Lord, He already is Lord. To regard Him as Lord is to recognize His authority in our lives.


In addition to revering the Lord, they needed to prepare a **•defense** to those who asked a reason for their **hope**. Christian hope is more than wishful thinking; it rests on the truth of the gospel.

Peter encouraged the believers to make their defense with **gentleness** and **reverence**. By responding in this manner, they would put to shame those who tried to **disparage** their **good conduct**. Perhaps the Christians would receive vindication, or maybe their persecutors would find Christ.

**Christian hope is more than wishful thinking;  
it rests on the truth of the gospel.**

**VERSE 17**

People often suffer because of their own doing. Those who abuse their body with drugs will pay a price for that abuse. Those who make poor financial decisions will face payday one day. But Peter was talking about suffering **for doing good**. By refusing to deny their faith and conforming to the world, they suffered at the hands of unbelievers. Even when we suffer in **God’s will**, we still have a hope nobody can extinguish.

 **Why is it important for believers to be able to explain the reason for their hope?**

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## BE ASSURED (1 PET. 3:18-20)

<sup>18</sup> For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> in which he also went and made proclamation to the spirits in prison <sup>20</sup> who in the past were disobedient, when God patiently waited in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared. In it a few—that is, eight people—were saved through water.

### VERSE 18

Peter reminded the suffering saints that their Savior had experienced suffering too. He suffered so that unrighteous people could have a right relationship to God through His substitutionary death on the cross. Peter declared that Jesus **suffered for sins once for all**. Jewish worshipers offered sacrifices year-round to atone for their sins, but Jesus offered Himself one time for all time, never to be repeated. The *sins* that caused Jesus's suffering were not His own. The Innocent suffered for the guilty so that the guilty could go free.

Jesus died so that He **might bring you to God**. Because of sin, a great gulf exists between God and humankind (Isa. 59:2). But Jesus stepped in as a mediator to bridge that gap (1 Tim. 2:5). His death did not automatically save every sinner in the world but saves those who trust Him for salvation. Peter's pronouncement was not a universalistic declaration that God would save everyone, but an affirmation that Christ's death was what was necessary to bridge the gap between sinful humanity and holy God.

Jesus was **put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit**. God intended and allowed Jesus to be put to death, yet He also raised Him from the dead. Being reminded of God's sovereignty in this process must have brought assurance to those who experienced suffering in Peter's day, and it should bring assurance to us today.


### VERSES 19-20

These verses have generated much discussion and are among the most difficult to understand in the New Testament. The first important discussion is the identity of the **spirits in prison**. Were these unbelievers who died? Were they Old Testament characters who died and were awaiting the return of Christ? Were they fallen angels awaiting judgment? Perhaps the most likely explanation is that Peter referred to sinful angels imprisoned until their time of punishment. Peter would

return to this subject, explaining that those angels who rebelled were cast into hell and kept for judgment (see 2 Pet. 2:4). Jude also referred to “angels who did not keep their own position but abandoned their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains in deep darkness for the judgment on the great day” (Jude 6). These angels awaited judgment, not another opportunity to follow Christ.

The second important discussion centers on what **proclamation** Jesus made to the spirits in prison. The word used for *proclamation* is not the same word used for evangelization. Jesus did not preach so that the angels would receive salvation. Rather, He likely pronounced judgment on them for their rebellion against God. Because verse 20 mentions Noah, some see this as a reference to judgment for the actions of the angels in Genesis 6:1-4. In one interpretation of that passage, angels had sexual relations with women in Noah’s day and received imprisonment for their sin. Peter was not saying that Christ descended into hell to preach to Old Testament saints but that He traveled to the prison of demonic spirits and proclaimed victory and judgment over them.

The reference to **Noah** strengthens the previous interpretation of verse 19. It also is present in the passage in Jude 6. After the fallen angels were **disobedient**, God **patiently waited in the days of Noah**. The state of the world had grieved God as the sinfulness of the spirit world and human world collided (Gen. 6:1-4). His patience allowed the building of the **ark** that would save **eight people** from the outpouring of God’s judgment. Those eight people were Noah’s family. As God had spared Noah and his family, whom the evildoers greatly outnumbered, He would also deliver those believers suffering at the hands of evildoers in Asia Minor. The water designed to bring God’s judgment on unbelievers became the means of escape for those in the ark. Jesus would be that ark for suffering Christians in Peter’s audience.

 **Why is it significant that Jesus’s death paid the price for all past, present, and future sins?**

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## SHOW OTHERS (1 PET. 3:21-22)

<sup>21</sup> **Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you (not as the removal of dirt from the body, but the pledge of a good conscience toward God) through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,** <sup>22</sup> **who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.**

### VERSES 21-22

Peter compared the floodwaters in Noah’s day to the baptismal waters that represented death. The same waters that signify the death of the unbeliever also emphasize the resurrection of the believer. Pastors often say, “Buried with Christ in baptism, raised to walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). The waters of baptism signal the death of the old person but also the resurrection of the believer in Christ.

What did Peter mean by the expression, ***baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you***? Peter was using an analogy. The waters themselves did not save Noah, but the ark, which sat upon the waters, saved Noah. Believers who trust in Christ are placed spiritually in Him, the One who saves. Peter emphasized this by comparing the ***removal of dirt from the body*** with the ***pledge of a good conscience toward God***. Though baptism does not literally remove sin, it does signal the inward change that happens because of God’s saving power. Baptism functions as a sign or symbol of faith in Christ. Like the floodwaters of Noah’s day, it represents death, but the resurrection of Christ, like the ark, causes the believer to rise as a new person.


### KEY DOCTRINE: Baptism

Baptism is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer’s faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, the believer’s death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. (See Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:11-13.)

Peter emphasized the reality of Jesus’s resurrection with the phrase, ***who has gone into heaven***. At the ascension, Jesus left earth to return to heaven, where He is seated at the ***right hand of God***. At His rightful place on the throne, Jesus has all authority. Romans 8:34 describes Jesus as seated at the right hand of God and praying for believers. Stephen, a servant of the church who experienced martyrdom, looked up and saw

Christ standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55). What an image to encourage suffering Christians!

Peter also encouraged his readers with the thought that *angels, authorities, and powers* were *subject to him*. As we look at the world around us, we may think everything is spinning out of control. We may deduce that evil is winning and everything is happening randomly with no purpose. But Peter reminds us that Jesus is at the right hand of God, where He has subjected all things to Himself. He is directing this world toward His purposes, and one day all suffering will cease, all unbelievers will receive judgment, and everything will be made right.

 What is the purpose and importance of baptism? How did Peter’s illustration of baptism encourage those who needed hope in the midst of their suffering?

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Memorize a verse and apply it to a real-life situation.*

Memorize 1 Peter 3:17 in your preferred Bible translation. Then write the verse in your own words. Finally, write a couple of sentences here or in a journal, stating how the verse can help you make a tough decision or face a difficult situation today, particularly one in which you are tempted to act in anger or hurt toward someone persecuting you for your faith.

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# APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers should be ready to give a reason for the faith they have.
- + Believers can be confident that Christ’s death was sufficient to obtain salvation.
- + Believers are to be baptized as a testimony of their faith in Christ.

○ **How would your testimony of faith in Christ encourage others in your Bible study group? Be prepared to share your testimony with them.**

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○ **What is another way, besides baptism, you can show others the hope inside of you? From where does that assurance of hope come? Why is it important for you to give a reason for your hope to others—both those who have that hope already and those who do not?**

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○ **Memorize 1 Peter 3:15.**

## *Prayer Needs*

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# Our Faith

*Believers grow in spiritual maturity when we seek to do God's will.*

## 1 PETER 4:1-11

Packing for a trip reveals something about a person's personality. Some start packing weeks in advance, while others pack the morning they leave. Some put everything they could possibly need in their luggage; others take only the bare essentials. Still others buy items they need once they arrive at their destination. Believers are equipped with everything they need to grow in spiritual maturity and battle sin in their lives.

- What kind of packer are you when it comes to getting ready for vacations? Why does it matter that believers have everything they need to grow in spiritual maturity?




# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## 1 PETER 4:1-11

The believers to whom Peter addressed this letter faced many potentially discouraging situations. First, they experienced localized persecution. Not only did they face physical persecution but also economic and political persecution in specific cities and regions. The believers would need to stand strong when facing these challenges. To stand strong, they needed to progress in spiritual maturity.

Peter had witnessed a firsthand picture of spiritual strength. He had followed Jesus throughout His earthly ministry. He saw how Jesus responded to those who opposed Him. He witnessed the humility of Christ as others misunderstood Him and tried to trap Him in His own words. He saw Jesus put others' needs ahead of His own, even taking a towel and washing his disciples' feet (John 13:6-9). Peter's understanding of spiritual maturity came from His relationship with Jesus.

Peter challenged his readers to learn from the example of Christ and to live with purpose (1 Pet. 4:1-3). That meant they could not live like the Gentiles. He also reminded them that one day those unbelievers would stand before God and face His judgment (4:4-6). This knowledge would give strength to the believers and a reasoned approach to their suffering. They would not suffer forever, and those hurting them would answer to God for their sin. Finally, Peter reminded his readers that God had graced them with gifts they could use to bring glory to God (4:7-11). As they matured and used their gifts, they would glorify Him.



**Read 1 Peter 4:1-11 and circle every word that indicates a sin or sinful behavior. In light of so many mentions of sin, why do you think spiritual maturity is so important? Read the passage again and list ways people progress in maturity that affect their battle with sin.**

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# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## PURPOSE (1 PET. 4:1-3)

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same understanding—because the one who suffers in the flesh is finished with sin— <sup>2</sup> in order to live the remaining time in the flesh no longer for human desires, but for God’s will. <sup>3</sup> For there has already been enough time spent in doing what the Gentiles choose to do: carrying on in unrestrained behavior, evil desires, drunkenness, orgies, carousing, and lawless idolatry.

## VERSES 1-2

Following Jesus does not make one immune from suffering. Jesus **suffered in the flesh**. He knew what it was like to suffer physical and emotional harm. His followers needed to **arm** themselves **with the same understanding** as Christ. Jesus understood the purpose of His suffering. He desired to fulfill the will of His Father, and that purpose allowed Him to approach suffering with a fully mature attitude.

After encouraging believers to prepare for suffering, Peter made an interesting parenthetical remark: **the one who suffers in the flesh is finished with sin**. This does not mean people who suffer no longer battle sin. Neither does it mean that suffering purifies believers to a state in which sin is no longer an issue, because many who suffer turn from God rather than to Him. The best way to understand Peter’s statement is to put it in its context. Suffering for what is right stands in contrast to suffering for sin. Those who have continued to do right even in the face of suffering have made a break with sin’s power in their lives. Spiritual maturity and a clear sense of purpose enable Christians to remain true to God even when they face suffering.

**Suffering can push us toward a more mature faith if we respond to it with a biblical perspective.**

Arming themselves with the attitude of Christ allowed them to live **the remaining time in the flesh** in a way that emphasized **God’s will** rather than **human desires**. If we respond to suffering properly and in the way Christ did, it can wean us of some of the human desires that are ungodly and keep us in God’s will. Suffering can push us toward a more mature faith if we respond to it with a biblical perspective.

VERSE 3

Before coming to Christ, the believers had spent time *doing what the Gentiles* do. They had lived to please themselves rather than God. They expended much energy in selfish pursuits. But as they came to Christ and grew in their faith, they learned to pursue the will of God.

Peter listed some vices of the Gentiles. First is *carrying on in unrestrained behavior*. This involved living without a moral compass. They did what made them feel good or what they wanted to do. Second on the list is *evil desires*. If they wanted something, they took it without considering what was right in God’s eyes.

The next three vices stand together. *Drunkenness, orgies,* and *carousing* all refer to a lifestyle of excess. *Lawless idolatry* is a reference to immoral religious practices that involved the worship of idols. In the absence of a relationship with God, unbelievers expressed their worship in the wrong direction.

● How can we keep God’s will at the center of our lives? How does spiritual maturity help us to do that?

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JUDGMENT (1 PET. 4:4-6)

<sup>4</sup> They are surprised that you don’t join them in the same flood of wild living—and they slander you. <sup>5</sup> They will give an account to the one who stands ready to judge the living and the dead. <sup>6</sup> For this reason the gospel was also preached to those who are now dead, so that, although they might be judged in the flesh according to human standards, they might live in the spirit according to God’s standards.

VERSE 4

The persecutors were *surprised* that Christians did not *join them in the same flood of wild living*. Those who do wrong will often look for others to validate their sinful actions. They feel that if everyone is doing it, then it must be right. But Christians took a stand against sexual immorality, reckless living, and empty idolatry.

This challenges us to hold godly standards of morality and not join the world in its pursuit of immorality. Also, it is a reminder that we have a price to pay when we reject the ungodly standards that exist in our world.

Unbelievers responded to the Christians with **●slander**. This word indicated verbal abuse, defamation, or the intent to ruin a person's reputation. In the case of Peter's readers, it went beyond that. The purpose of the slander was to justify the persecution against Christians. They spoke ill of them to win public opinion against them.

## VERSE 5

Peter affirmed that those who persecuted Christians would **give an account**. The phrase *give an account* is courtroom language. Persecutors attempted to win the court of public opinion, but one day they would stand in another courtroom that mattered infinitely more. The judge that day will have ultimate jurisdiction and will judge **the living and the dead**. The only thing delaying that day of judgment, Peter would later say, is the patience of God waiting for more to come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9).

Believers will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and give account of their lives (1 Cor. 3:11-15). Some of what they did will last, like gold, silver and precious stones. Some of what they did will not last, like wood, hay, and stubble. Believers will be saved, but their work will be tested.

Unbelievers will stand before the great white throne of judgment (Rev. 20:11-15). Because they never trusted in Jesus's atoning death, they will be judged according to their own sinful works. Every sin will cry against them so that they will be consigned to eternal separation from God in hell. Both believers and unbelievers give account to God, but their outcomes are drastically different.


## KEY DOCTRINE: *Last Things*

The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord. (See 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; Revelation 20:11-15.)

## VERSE 6

The **reason** Peter and others had preached **the gospel** to those who are **now dead** was that they would have life eternal. When they were alive, they heard the gospel and turned from their sin to Christ. When they turned to Christ, they were **judged in the flesh according to human standards**. This is a restatement of what Peter said in verses 3-4. His preaching of the gospel resulted in salvation for unbelievers, but it also put them in a place to receive the scorn and judgment of those who did not understand spiritual things. However, they were able to **live in the spirit according to God's standards**.

Why preach the gospel if it puts others at odds with the world? Peter said it was worth it because it produced life abundant and eternal in those who chose to follow Christ. Spiritual maturity allows a person to see that God will judge those who persecute him, but it also allows him to see the benefits of God's saving power in his own life.

 How should knowing we will give an account to Jesus affect Christians' lives each day?

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## GOD'S GLORY (1 PET. 4:7-11)

<sup>7</sup> The end of all things is near; therefore, be alert and sober-minded for prayer. <sup>8</sup> Above all, maintain constant love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins. <sup>9</sup> Be hospitable to one another without complaining. <sup>10</sup> Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve others, as good stewards of the varied grace of God. <sup>11</sup> If anyone speaks, let it be as one who speaks God's words; if anyone serves, let it be from the strength God provides, so that God may be glorified through Jesus Christ in everything. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

## VERSE 7

Peter reminded his readers that the **end of all things is near**. This was not a missed prediction that Jesus's return was imminent. Rather, it organized time in a redemptive manner. God created. Humanity fell. Jesus came. Jesus died, rose, and ascended to the Father. The next big event on the redemptive calendar was the **end of all things**. Jesus would return. In the meantime, Peter encouraged believers to be **alert**.

Christians needed to guard their minds as they sought to do the will of God. They also had a responsibility to be **sober-minded**. This involved self-control. They needed to think rightly and act rightly because that put them in a position of **prayer**. A praying church keeps its focus on glorifying God. Even in difficult times, churches do not focus on themselves but on the glory of God.

### VERSE 8

One of the ways believers glorify God is by treating one another with love and respect. Peter encouraged believers to have **constant love for one another**. Those who suffer can grow bitter and only think of their own needs. Spiritual maturity causes even those who are suffering to display love to others. Peter quoted a proverb to express the importance of love. He stated, **love covers a multitude of sins**. Proverbs 10:12 says, “Hatred stirs up conflicts, but love covers all offenses.” This does not mean that love atones for sin in the same sense as Jesus’s blood. Loving others does help prevent focusing on others’ faults. We find it far easier to judge those we do not love. God is glorified with a love that focuses on Him and not on others’ faults.

### VERSE 9

We also bring glory to God when we are **hospitable to one another**. Hospitality characterized the early church. (See Rom. 12:13; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8; Heb. 13:2.) As believers experienced the grace of God at work in their own lives, they extended help in the form of food, shelter, and care to others. As persecution grew, the need for hospitality would only increase. However, hospitality alone was not the standard. They were to do so **without complaining**. We mask God’s glory in our lives when we complain about serving others. We serve others because we want to bring glory to God in the way we treat those who belong to Him.

**God does not have any ungifted children.**

### VERSES 10-11

We glorify God when we use the gifts He has given to us to **serve others**. Peter reminded his readers that **each one has received a gift**. God does not have any ungifted children. Believers must be good **stewards**, or managers, of the gifts that God has given. Peter divided the gifts into two categories, speaking and serving. No matter which gift


believers used, they were to use them in the **strength God provides** and for the purpose that **God may be glorified**. The messenger or the servant did not receive the glory. That glory was reserved for the Lord.

Peter expressed a benediction on this section by stating, **To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen**. God created all things and all things have the purpose of glorifying Him. As believers thought about things and acted responsibly, they used their gifts to glorify God and bring honor to His name.

 **Why are spiritual gifts important to the life of the church?**

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 **Why is it important to exercise those gifts in a responsible manner?**

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Use multiple Scripture passages to understand a major doctrine.*

What impact should the return of Christ have on our behavior now?  
Read the following Bible passages from the book of Hebrews and take note of what they teach about Jesus’s return and its impact on believers in the meantime: Hebrews 9:27-28; 10:19-25; and 12:25-29. How can you relate these passages to 1 Peter 4:7-11?

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# APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers need to understand that they have a new purpose in life—God’s will.
- + Believers can be assured that God will hold all people accountable on the day of judgment.
- + Believers bring glory to God when they live in unity and serve each other in love.

**What are some of the speaking and serving gifts that God has placed in your Bible study group? How can these gifts be used for the glory of God? What opportunities has this group created for people to exercise their gifts?**

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**How have you centered your life on the purpose of God? What does that look like? In what ways can you serve others this week? How can that bring glory to God?**

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**Memorize 1 Peter 4:10.**

## Prayer Needs

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**Explore the Bible Prayer Guide**  
Scan here for a weekly prayer guide based on this quarter’s Bible passages.



# Our Savior

*Jesus’s death paid the price for our sins, and His resurrection made eternal life available for those who believe.*

## MARK 15:33-39; 16:1-8

Most online shopping sites have a shopping cart at the top. If you see something you like, you add it to your shopping cart. It costs nothing to add items to your cart. However, at some point you have to pay for items in the cart if you want to secure them. Living a life of sin seems fun and painless as we keep adding items to our “sin cart.” Nevertheless, those sins come with a price.

☐ Is it easier to spend more while online shopping or shopping in the store? Why?

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# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## MARK 15:33-39; 16:1-8

Though the gospels tell the story of Jesus, they are not merely a biography. They tell the story to teach who Jesus was and what it means to follow Him. Mark began his Gospel with the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist (Mark 1:1-11). This inaugurated Jesus’s three-year ministry, including the calling of His disciples, the miracles and teachings of Jesus, and the final week of Jesus’s life. Mark’s Gospel presents Jesus’s ministry in a rapid-fire series of events and teachings that led to the cross. Almost forty percent of Mark relates to the events surrounding Jesus’s crucifixion—a higher percentage than any of the other Gospels.

Jesus did not merely give us an example to follow. He went to the cross to die for our sin. He emphasized this when He said, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Jesus’s death secured forgiveness for sin—something no one can achieve by his own merit.

Likewise, resurrection was a vital part of the gospel story. Not only did Jesus die, but God raised Him from the dead. Without the resurrection, the passion narrative would have ended in defeat. Peter alluded to this in his first sermon in Acts 2:24: “God raised him up, ending the pains of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by death.” Christ’s resurrection secured our eventual resurrection from the dead (1 Cor. 15:20). This week’s lesson focuses on the death and resurrection of Jesus.



**Read Mark 15:33-39; 16:1-8 and try to imagine the emotions of the disciples who grappled with these events. What positive and negative emotions might they have felt? What emotions do you bring to the table when considering the death and resurrection of Christ?**

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# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## MOCKED (MARK 15:33-36)

<sup>33</sup> When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. <sup>34</sup> And at three Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “*Eloi, Eloi, lemá sabachtháni?*” which is translated, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” <sup>35</sup> When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “See, he’s calling for Elijah.” <sup>36</sup> Someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, fixed it on a stick, offered him a drink, and said, “Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down.”

### VERSE 33

This week’s focal passage begins after the nailing of Jesus on the cross and the insults of those who ridiculed Him (15:20-32). At **noon**, literally “the sixth hour,” **darkness came over the whole land**. Darkness in the Bible often signaled judgment. In Exodus 10:21-23, darkness covered the land of Egypt for three days. Describing a time of judgment, the prophet Amos said, “And in that day—this is the declaration of the LORD—I will make the sun go down at noon; I will darken the land in the daytime” (Amos 8:9).

Darkness covered the land until **three in the afternoon**, literally “the ninth hour.” Half of the time Jesus hung on the cross, darkness covered the land. The gospel does not indicate whether God used a natural phenomenon or supernaturally sent the darkness, for that is not the point of the passage. Every bystander felt the weight of the moment.

### VERSE 34

Jesus cried out from the cross in Aramaic, ***Eloi, Eloi, lemá sabachtháni*** [EE loh igh–EE loh igh-lah muh-suh BAHK thuh nee]. Mark translated the phrase into Greek: ***My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?*** It is important to know that Jesus was quoting Scripture, specifically Psalm 22. Psalm 22:1 says, “My God my God, why have you abandoned me? Why are you so far from my deliverance and from my words of groaning?” Jesus identified with the loneliness and suffering of David. Much of Psalm 22 parallels Jesus’s experience on the cross. But while this Psalm started with groaning, it ended with victory: “All the families of the nations will bow down before you, for kingship belongs to the LORD; he rules the nations” (Ps. 22:27b-28). Jesus meditated on this psalm as He hung on the cross.

VERSES 35-36

Some who heard Jesus’s words misunderstood what He was saying. They heard *Eloi, Eloi* and surmised Jesus was calling for ***Elijah***. The Old Testament had indicated Elijah would return in the days of the Messiah (see Mal. 4:5-6). But they did not understand that Elijah had already come, both in the spirit of John the Baptist (Matt. 11:7-14; Luke 1:17) and at the transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-4).


Some thought Jesus’s call for Elijah resulted from the weight of His suffering on the cross. One person ***filled a sponge with sour wine***. Sour wine, made with vinegar and water, was used predominantly by Roman soldiers as a beverage. But it also was used by the general public, regardless of ethnic or religious background.

This unknown person likely never knew that his actions fulfilled Scripture in Psalm 69:21, “They gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” His purpose in giving the wine was to see ***if Elijah comes to take him down***. The drink would presumably keep Him alive long enough to see if Elijah would come. The bystander’s intentions may have indicated true curiosity or may have been another form of mockery.

 **How does an understanding of Jesus’s suffering influence your appreciation of salvation?**

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 **Why do you think people misunderstood Jesus’s suffering in that day? Is this a problem in our day?**

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**KILLED (MARK 15:37-39)**

**<sup>37</sup> Jesus let out a loud cry and breathed his last. <sup>38</sup> Then the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. <sup>39</sup> When the centurion, who was standing opposite him, saw the way he breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!”**

**VERSES 37-38**


After six hours on the cross, Jesus uttered *a loud cry*. This may have been the loud cry recorded in John 19:30, “It is finished.” Or maybe these were the last words found in Luke 23:46, “Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit.” Neither of these were cries of defeat. Both entrusted the events of the cross to the sovereignty of God. Jesus had fulfilled the plan of His Father, and He laid down His life rather than having it taken from Him. With these words, Jesus *breathed his last*.

Verse 38 notes another unusual occurrence. At that moment, the *curtain of the temple* was torn in two. This curtain separated the holy place from the holy of holies. The holy of holies was associated with the presence of God. The curtain, two to three inches thick, represented the division between Holy God and sinful humanity. Its ripping from *top to bottom* indicates this was an act of God, not man. Jesus’s death opened the way to God. “For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, a testimony at the proper time” (1 Tim. 2:5-6).

**VERSE 39**


The *centurion* who presided over the crucifixion witnessed all the events of the crucifixion—the scourging, mocking, crucifixion, and words of Christ from the cross. He saw the darkness and the calm confidence in Jesus. All these things together deeply impressed this soldier who undoubtedly had taken part in many crucifixions.

He exclaimed, “*Truly this man was the Son of God!*” Jesus’s death on the cross convinced the centurion that Jesus was more than a man. Earlier, God Himself had called Jesus the *Son of God* (Mark 1:11; 9:7), and even the demons had made this confession (3:11; 5:7). For the first time, humans made the declaration that Jesus was God’s Son.

 **How did Jesus demonstrate His authority even as He died on the cross?**

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 **How did the events of the cross lead the centurion to believe that Jesus was the Son of God?**

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## KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Son*

Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with mankind yet without sin. (See 2 Corinthians 5:19-21; Hebrews 9:12-15.)

## RESURRECTED (MARK 16:1-8)

<sup>1</sup> When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they could go and anoint him.

<sup>2</sup> Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they went to the tomb at sunrise. <sup>3</sup> They were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone from the entrance to the tomb for us?” <sup>4</sup> Looking up, they noticed that the stone—which was very large—had been rolled away. <sup>5</sup> When they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side; they were alarmed. <sup>6</sup> “Don’t be alarmed,” he told them. “You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they put him. <sup>7</sup> But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you to Galilee; you will see him there just as he told you.’” <sup>8</sup> They went out and ran from the tomb, because trembling and astonishment overwhelmed them. And they said nothing to anyone, since they were afraid.

### VERSES 1-2

Jesus died on Friday, and those in charge of His body did not have time to complete the burial process before the start of the Sabbath (15:42-47). So *when the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome*, the mother of James and John (Matt. 27:56) *bought spices, so they could go and anoint him*. Since Sabbath had interrupted their process, they returned to finish the task of preparing the body. They must have had an eagerness to finish the task because they went to the tomb *at sunrise*. The fact that the women went to anoint the body of Jesus indicates they were not expecting His resurrection.

### VERSES 3-4

The conversation on the way to the tomb concerned the *stone* that sealed the entrance to the tomb. The women were wondering how they would remove it, not knowing that the Lord had already taken care of

the problem. As they arrived, they saw that the **very large** stone no longer sealed the entrance to the tomb. The passive voice of **had been rolled away** has been called by some Bible teachers a “divine passive,” a way of saying God did it.

The women were able to walk into the tomb to complete their process of anointing the body of Christ. However, they had a problem yet to be seen—Jesus was not in the tomb.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Scholars have estimated that a stone large enough to seal the entrance of a tomb would have weighed one and a half to two tons.

### VERSES 5-6

As the women entered the tomb, they saw a **young man dressed in a white robe**. The reference to the clothing of the *young man* is Mark’s not-so-subtle way of implying this was an angel. Matthew (28:3) and John (20:12) reference angels wearing white robes. Understandably, the presence of the angel **alarmed** the women. They didn’t understand what was happening. They expected the body of Jesus to be where they left it, but now it was gone, and an angel stood in its place.


The angel told them not to be afraid, but to **see the place where they put him**. They did not see the body of Jesus because the angel explained He had **risen**. Jesus had predicted this at different times in His ministry (Matt. 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19). But when it happened, nobody seemed to expect it. Who would? Resurrection could not happen except by the power of God.

### VERSES 7-8

The women could not keep the news to themselves. The angel told them to **go, tell his disciples and Peter**. The special mention of Peter likely is related to his denial of the Lord before the crucifixion. Peter needed extra reassurance and encouragement.

Women, unable to testify in a court of law in that day, became the first witnesses to tell the story of the resurrection. Still, **trembling** and **astonishment** came over them. They could not explain everything, but that did not stop them from sharing what they had experienced—the good news of what God had done in raising Christ from the dead. The empty tomb changed their lives, their behaviors, and their attitudes.

They left the tomb, responding to the challenge to spread the news of the gospel. Matthew 28:8 reports, “So, departing quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, they ran to tell his disciples the news.” (See also Luke 24:9-10.)

 **What impact does the empty tomb have on your life each day? How has your encounter with the resurrected Christ changed the trajectory of your life?**

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Use other Scripture to help understand a Bible passage.*

Compare and contrast Mark’s crucifixion and resurrection account with those of Matthew 27–28 and Luke 23–24. Make note of the similarities and differences. Using a study Bible, Bible dictionary, or commentary, discern some of the reasons behind the many variances. What impact did this exercise have on your trust in the Gospel accounts and the historicity of Jesus’s death and resurrection?

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# APPLY THE TEXT


- + People can be assured of how much Jesus loves them by the suffering He willingly endured on the cross.
- + We can know that Jesus is the Son of God whose death made possible our salvation.
- + The empty tomb demands a response.



**Read again the account of the resurrection of Christ in Mark 16:1-8. With your Bible study group, talk about why “they said nothing to anyone” (v. 8). What barriers would they have to overcome in sharing the story? What barriers keep your group from sharing the gospel story?**

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**Consider the Roman centurion’s response in Mark 15:39. What evidences convince you that Jesus is the Son of God? What response does the resurrection of Christ demand of you?**

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**Memorize Mark 16:6.**

## Prayer Needs

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# Be Prepared

*Believers can expect to face opposition for following Christ.*

## 1 PETER 4:12-19

Children sometimes engage in name-calling. Often, it's not meant to be personal, they want to have things their way. It's a form of manipulation. But children are not the only ones who play those games. Believers can expect to face opposition for following Christ. It may come in the form of verbal abuse—name-calling or ridicule and scorn. We should realize that this is not an indication that our views are wrong but is a form of manipulation.



**How do you usually respond when someone opposes your ideas? Does your response change based on the severity and type of opposition?**

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# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT


## 1 PETER 4:12-19

Peter directly mentioned suffering in each chapter of his first letter (1 Pet. 1:11; 2:19; 3:13; 4:12,13; 5:1,9). He referred to suffering on other occasions without using the word. The suffering being addressed was the kind that resulted from opposition to the gospel.

Peter was writing to Christians who lived during the reign of Nero (AD 54-68). One of the defining events during that reign was the fire that destroyed half of Rome. Though the cause of the fire remains uncertain, people blamed the emperor. He, in turn, blamed the Christians. The Roman historian Tacitus reported that Nero turned the people against Christians and threw them to the dogs, crucified them, and burned them. Though this happened in Rome, it would affect believers in places where Peter’s readers lived in Asia Minor. Peter likely wrote his first letter just before the outbreak of Neronian persecution.

Some of the persecution in Asia Minor occurred at the hands of the Jews, who wanted to distance themselves from Christianity. Some of the persecution happened because the Christians lived in a culture that worshiped many gods. The practices of the Greek and Roman religions made the Christians look anti-social and anti-Roman. People tend to oppose what they do not understand.

The opposition to Christianity became one of the tools God used to spread His glory. God used the Christians’ Christ-like response to commend the gospel to those who opposed it. Christians who face opposition have an opportunity to demonstrate the power of the gospel in the way that they respond to their persecutors.

 **Read 1 Peter 4:12-19 and circle all the ways that Christians should respond in the face of opposition. How can these responses help the believer? How could these responses help the unbeliever?**

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# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## BE READY (1 PET. 4:12-14)

<sup>12</sup> Dear friends, don't be surprised when the fiery ordeal comes among you to test you, as if something unusual were happening to you.

<sup>13</sup> Instead, rejoice as you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may also rejoice with great joy when his glory is revealed. <sup>14</sup> If you are ridiculed for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

### VERSE 12

From the beginning of the gospel's spread to Asia Minor, unbelieving Jews had stirred opposition against the Christian message (see Acts 14:4-6,19; 17:5-9). Peter told the churches not to be ***surprised when the fiery ordeal*** came against them. The Greek word for *fiery* can be translated "burning." The choice of this word indicated a trial that would test them and refine them like a furnace refines precious metal, burning away its impurities. The word *surprised* appeared also in 1 Peter 4:4. There, it described the shock that unbelievers experienced when believers resisted their ways. Peter encouraged Christians not to share that same attitude when they saw trials coming their way. Trials would come. But that did not necessarily mean they were outside the will of God.

Trials provide a ***test*** for believers. As Christians, we must see the good purposes of God even in our suffering. He can use trials to accomplish His work in us. Instead of acting as if trials are ***something unusual***, we should prepare ourselves for the test.

### VERSE 13

Instead of reacting with shock, they should ***rejoice*** in their suffering. Peter encouraged the church to see its trials as an opportunity to ***share in the sufferings of Christ***. Peter's words echoed the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus said, "Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt. 5:12). Paul said that the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, but so does His comfort (2 Cor. 1:5-7). In Colossians, Paul used an unusual expression to say that Christ's suffering did not end with His life, but He now suffers through His church (Col. 1:24). We can have joy in suffering when we realize that we are sharing in Christ's suffering.

Rejoicing in the suffering of Christ will make His return even more glorious for us. We will ***rejoice with great joy when his glory is revealed***. When Christ returns, He will judge those who have persecuted Christians, and He will remove all death, grief, crying, and pain (Rev. 21:4). All suffering will cease. Knowing Jesus is worth any temporary pain on earth.

**VERSE 14**

At this point, verbal abuse was the primary type of suffering Christians in Asia Minor were enduring. Unbelievers ***ridiculed*** them. Other translations of this word include reviled, abused, and slandered. When these things happened for the cause of Christ, Christians could rejoice. Jesus had said that His followers were ***blessed*** when people reviled and persecuted them because of Him (Matt. 5:11-12).

The way to have joy in the midst of verbal assaults was to realize that ***the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you***. God sent His Spirit as a down payment or pledge that He would finish His work and keep believers to the end (Eph. 1:13). When we have the Spirit of God in us—and all believers do (Rom. 8:9)—we can be confident we will pass the test of suffering.

 **How can we be ready for the test of suffering?**

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 **What happens if we're not ready?**

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**BE RIGHTEOUS (1 PET. 4:15-16)**

<sup>15</sup> **Let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or a meddler.** <sup>16</sup> **But if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed but let him glorify God in having that name.**

**VERSE 15**

Not all suffering is the same. The Bible makes it clear that some suffering is the result of personal sin. The person who suffers because he is

*a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or a meddler* only has himself to blame. The Greek word translated *meddler* occurs only here in the New Testament. It literally meant to watch over someone's affairs. In this context it indicates mischief-makers or busybodies.

**VERSE 16**

While some people suffered because they brought suffering upon themselves, Peter did not place the **Christian** in that category. This was a rare use of the word *Christian*. The word appears only three times in the New Testament. The name first appeared as a term of derision by outsiders in Antioch (Acts 11:26). Agrippa also used the word as Paul defended his faith against the king (26:28). The word “Christian” means “follower of Christ.” Apparently, it was a term given to believers by those outside of the faith.

***The shame is in denying Christ,  
not in suffering for Christ.***

When Christians suffer, two things should happen. First, they should **not be ashamed**. Peter understood shame. He had tried to avoid persecution by claiming he didn't know Jesus (Mark 14:66-72). Luke revealed that Jesus turned and made eye contact with Peter immediately after the denial (Luke 22:61). Can you imagine the shame Peter felt having sacrificed his fellowship with Christ to avoid suffering? The shame is in denying Christ, not in suffering for Christ.

A second thing should happen when Christians suffer. They should **glorify God in having that name**. What did Peter mean by this? Christians who suffer wear the name of Christ in their suffering. All across our world, people suffer for the cause of Christ, and their suffering is great. Yet they wear the name of Christ by displaying His attitude in suffering. They rejoice instead of living in shame. All Christians have a privilege to wear the name of Christ as a testimony to those who do not believe in Him.

 **How can believers bring glory to God in a time of suffering?**

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What is the message of the gospel to those who are suffering as a result of their own sin?

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### KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Father*

God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace. (See Deuteronomy 32:6; Jeremiah 10:10.)

### BE ASSURED (1 PET. 4:17-19)

<sup>17</sup> For the time has come for judgment to begin with God's household, and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who disobey the gospel of God? <sup>18</sup> And if a righteous person is saved with difficulty, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? <sup>19</sup> So then, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator while doing what is good.

### VERSE 17

Believers facing persecution for their faith can be assured that God will one day judge the wicked. He is fully trustworthy and will deliver His people. The message is that we can trust God even when suffering.

Often, we think of *judgment* only in negative terms, but judgment can be positive as well. A court case can render either a guilty or innocent verdict. The word *judgment* could be either, as it indicates a true and impartial judgment.

Suffering provides the litmus test of true faith and starts with the people of God, not those who actively persecute them. Judgment coming first to the people of God was not a new idea (see Ezek. 9:6; Zech. 13:7-9; Mal. 3:1-5). If God started with judgment in His own household, those outside could be sure that it would come to them also. Therefore, Peter asked, ***What will the outcome be for those who disobey the gospel of God?***

## VERSE 18

Since God judges both the righteous and the wicked, believers can be assured that recompense will come to those who persecute them. Those doing the persecution need to know they will face the outcome of their rejection of the gospel. To reinforce this truth, Peter alluded to Proverbs 11:31, “If the righteous will be repaid on earth, how much more the wicked and sinful.” What did Peter mean by ***a righteous person is saved with difficulty***? This is likely a reference to the persecution and suffering they endured for the sake of the gospel. It does not mean that God barely saved Christians, but that He saved them through great difficulty.

Peter asked a sobering question in verse 18, ***what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?*** If God allows His children to suffer, then who can fathom the wrath of God poured out on those who first rejected His Son and then used that rejection to persecute the people of God? He would throw them into the lake of fire, where they would suffer forever (Rev. 20:11-15). The Christians, on the other hand, would suffer no more in the presence of God in heaven (21:1-7).

***God always does what is right.***

## VERSE 19

This verse sums up the discussion about suffering with an exhortation to those who suffered. Those who shared in Christ’s suffering (1 Pet. 4:13), experienced ridicule for the sake of Christ (v. 14), and suffered because of their faith (vv. 15-16) needed to do two things. First, they needed to ***entrust themselves to a faithful Creator***. The New Testament writers rarely called God *Creator*, though the idea permeates the pages of the New Testament. (See Rom. 1:25; Col. 3:10; and 1 Pet. 4:19.) Why would Peter here use this designation for God? He was asking believers to entrust themselves to the One who made the world and sustains it. They did not have to bear their suffering alone; God stood ready to sustain them. Further, Peter qualified the name *Creator* with the adjective *faithful*. He was reminding the believers of God’s faithful love and mighty power.


Second, Peter encouraged them to entrust themselves to God ***while doing what is good***. Suffering Christians did not need to abandon their faith because of their difficulties. They needed to continue doing the right things even when the world brought their own judgment

against them. They needed to await God’s judgment that made all things right. When you suffer for Christ’s sake, keep doing the right thing and be assured that God knows how to make a proper judgment. God always does what is right.

 **What are some promises we can cling to during suffering?**

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 **What is the difference between the way Christians and unbelievers think about judgment?**

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Dig deeper into the background and usage of key words or phrases.*

Make note of words and phrases related to suffering in 1 Peter 4:12-19. Compare how these terms are rendered in several Bible translations. Use a concordance to find other uses of these terms in the Bible. Scan the passages and make notes of any findings that help you better understand the terms. Then read the entry for the terms in a Bible dictionary, adding to your notes.

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# APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers can anticipate opposition and ridicule for following Christ.
- + Believers who suffer because of their faith are to glorify God.
- + Believers can trust God even when suffering.

**What are some of the ways people suffer for the sake of Christ today? With your Bible study group, suggest ways you can minister to believers who are experiencing opposition for following Christ.**

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**How has suffering in your life strengthened your faith? How has it challenged your faith? How has God used it in your life to bless others?**

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**Memorize 1 Peter 4:16.**

## Prayer Needs

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# Be Humble

*Believers are called to display a spirit of humility with each other and God.*

## 1 PETER 5:1-11

Most people want to be seen and known. A football player does a little extra dance in the end zone. People post on social media fabulous pictures from their trips to fabulous places. It's not wrong to want others to see and know us . . . unless what we want them to see or know is not really us. Some people think of humility as a low view of themselves. But humility is an honest view. People who are humble place themselves under the authority of God and recognize that without Him they are nothing.

- What are some examples of pride you see in society? What are some examples of humility you see in the people around you?

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# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## 1 PETER 5:1-14

Church leaders have an important role in equipping the church to navigate the Christian life in a world that is unfriendly—if not hostile—to believers. If judgment starts within the church itself (1 Pet. 4:17), we need church leaders to set an example and to guide the members toward lives of holiness. When a church faces persecution, it can create a lot of stress and anxiety among the congregation. Peter urged pastors to step up to the plate, not only to provide support and care for their weary flock, but also to encourage them to persevere through their suffering in a way that honors God.

The apostle Paul listed qualifications for leaders in the church in 1 Timothy 3:1-13. Peter knew that a suffering church needed all of these characteristics and more in a leader. He knew that leaders needed the humility to put the needs of others above their own needs.

The weight of faithfulness in the church did not depend solely on those who led. Peter also addressed the followers in 1 Peter 5:5-7. Sometimes strong leaders have the gifts to lead the congregation, but the people they try to lead do not have the humility to follow. Both leaders and members need humility.

Leaders and members need to work together in humility because they share a common enemy. Satan is a lion, roaming around looking for his next meal. He wants to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10). Paul had listed weapons used in spiritual warfare against this enemy (Eph. 6:10-18). He mentioned prayer as a key piece in wearing the armor of God. Prayer is the ultimate place of humility, admitting our dependence upon and need for God.

- Read 1 Peter 5:1-11 and circle all the commands related to leaders. Double underline all the commands related to believers in general. Single underline the commands related to how believers respond to their enemy.

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# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## OUR PASTORS (1 PET. 5:1-4)

<sup>1</sup> I exhort the elders among you as a fellow elder and witness to the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory about to be revealed: <sup>2</sup> Shepherd God's flock among you, not overseeing out of compulsion but willingly, as God would have you; not out of greed for money but eagerly; <sup>3</sup> not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. <sup>4</sup> And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

### VERSE 1

In Acts 20:17, the term **•elders** is interchangeable with “overseers,” indicating they were the same office. The term is always plural, meaning that a plurality of elders served the churches in various areas. They exercised pastoral ministry with things such as visiting the sick and needy (Jas. 5:14). They exercised leadership in the congregation (1 Tim. 5:17). They settled disputes in the church (Acts 15:1-2), and they devoted themselves to prayer and teaching the Word (6:2-4). The tasks were large.

Peter spoke as a **fellow elder** who knew what it was like to suffer for Christ. Like them, he longed to see **the glory about to be revealed**. The return of Christ kept him hopeful, even in suffering. This theme continued to motivate Peter (1 Pet. 1:7; 4:13; 5:4,10).

### VERSES 2-3

Peter told the elders to **shepherd God's flock**. Verses 1-3 include the three terms for pastoral leadership in the New Testament—pastor (shepherd), elder, and overseer. Ezekiel 34:4 warned about shepherds who would care only for themselves and neglect their flocks. This type of pastoral leadership makes for a weak flock and weak sheep.

Peter challenged church leaders to oversee the needs of their congregation **willingly** and not **out of compulsion**. Leaders are to serve out of a sense of their calling not out of duty or obligation alone. Neither should they serve **out of greed for money**. The practice of compensating church leaders occurred early in the life of the church. But pastors did not serve for money and needed to guard their hearts against greed. They were to serve **eagerly**. Humble pastors have generous hearts and lack greed. This causes them to serve out of the joy of their calling.


Peter encouraged pastors not to lead by ***lording it over those entrusted*** to them. This says a lot. *Lording* meant to rule forcefully and harshly. Leadership is a trust given to pastors by God. They lead because they receive a calling from God.

**VERSE 4**

In this verse, Peter offered three ways for church leaders to maintain humility. First, pastors should remind themselves that Jesus is the ***chief Shepherd***. This is the only usage of the term in the New Testament. Pastors have authority, but their authority is given to them by Christ. If their leadership is not Christlike, then they are not leading out of the authority given to them by the *chief Shepherd*. Jesus called Himself the Good Shepherd, and His humility led Him to lay down His life for the sheep (John 10:11).

Second, leaders need to remember that the chief Shepherd will return. The One who had all authority in heaven and earth will return, and they will give account of their work.

Third, Peter revealed that rewards await the faithful. He declared that pastors would receive ***the unfading crown of glory***. The New Testament often equates the crown with entrance into heaven (1 Cor. 9:25; 2 Tim. 4:8; Jas. 1:12; Rev. 2:10; 3:11). This crown could also be a special reward for those who faithfully completed their tasks (1 Cor. 3:10-17). Either way, the pastor has motivation to remain humble in fulfilling his ministry.



**Why is humility an important quality for a church leader? What effects might a humble pastor have upon a congregation?**

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**FOR BELIEVERS (1 PET. 5:5-7)**

<sup>5</sup> In the same way, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. All of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. <sup>6</sup> Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the proper time, <sup>7</sup> casting all your cares on him, because he cares about you.

## VERSE 5

Peter shifted the discussion from elders to those who were **younger**. The word *younger* did not indicate chronological age but spiritual maturity. All believers in the church were to **be subject to the elders**. Peter had several exhortations for believers.

First, Peter encouraged them, ***all of you clothe yourselves with humility***. Humility is not thinking too highly of yourself. Neither is it thinking too lowly of oneself. The humble are those who have a proper estimation of themselves. The word for *clothe yourselves* sometimes referred to a servant putting on an apron before serving. Jesus did this by girding Himself with a towel and washing His disciples' feet (John 13:4-17).

Second, Peter encouraged believers to direct their humility **toward one another**. True humility serves others. Peter alluded to the teaching of Proverbs 3:34 as he revealed that **God resists the proud**. The proverb says, "He mocks those who mock" (Prov. 3:34). However, God **gives grace to the humble**. As we humble ourselves, God comes to our aid, sometimes using others who take up the mantle of service to meet our needs.

## VERSE 6

The next exhortation was to ***humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God***. It is better to humble ourselves under God than to cause Him to humble us because of our pride. The expression *mighty hand of God* occurs often in the Old Testament to describe God's deliverance of Israel during their times of trouble (Ex. 3:19; 32:11; Deut. 5:15). It also referred to God's discipline of His people (Ex. 6:1; Job 30:21; Ps. 32:4).

Those who humble themselves under the hand of the Lord can be confident that He will **exalt** them. Peter didn't explain what that exaltation would look like. Did he indicate that God would give blessings in this life or in the life to come, or both? Humility brings many blessings to this life. It increases our fellowship with God and helps us to love others more deeply. Ultimately, God will exalt us in eternity as we enter into His presence to be with Him forever.

Peter noted the uncertainty of the timing of this exaltation with the words, **at the proper time**. Greeks had different expressions of time. Sometimes they spoke of chronological time (*chronos*), while other times they spoke of an appointed or specific time set aside (*kairos*). God will exalt the humble at the appointed time. He did not promise to deliver


them from their suffering in their lifetime, but He would in eternity. They only had to wait for that appointed time and trust God that He would faithfully deliver them. The same is true for us today.

***We have the same certainty as believers  
in Peter’s day—Jesus cares about us.***

**VERSE 7**

God’s mighty hand can rescue us from any situation at any time, but sometimes He chooses to delay His assistance. We are encouraged to pray while we wait. We are to cast ***all*** our ***cares*** on the Lord. The word for *cares* can mean worries, anxieties, fears, or uncertainties.

Believers in Peter’s day had reasons for anxiety after their conversion to Christ—loss of status and respect, loss of family, loss of friends, loss of livelihood, and in extreme cases the loss of their lives. We have many reasons for anxiety in our day. But we have the same certainty as believers in Peter’s day—Jesus ***cares*** about us. This word means to give ones attention to accomplishing a purpose. As we cast our cares on the Lord, He acts toward us with intentional purpose.



**Why is it important for believers to turn their cares over to God? How do we do that?**

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**A WARNING (1 PET. 5:8-11)**

<sup>8</sup> **Be sober-minded, be alert. Your adversary the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour.** <sup>9</sup> **Resist him, firm in the faith, knowing that the same kind of sufferings are being experienced by your fellow believers throughout the world.** <sup>10</sup> **The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, strengthen, and support you after you have suffered a little while.** <sup>11</sup> **To him be dominion forever. Amen.**

## VERSE 8

All believers are to **be** •*sober-minded* and *alert*. These terms encourage us to remain vigilant like a watchman guarding a wall for the approach of an enemy. *Sober-minded* means to have a serious mindset, and *alert* means to persevere in that mindset.

The reason for these instructions was they had an **adversary** who was *prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour*. The contrast could not be any greater in light of verse 7. God cares for His own, but the adversary seeks to devour. Believers need to be aware of the enemy's schemes.

## VERSE 9

Believers have a responsibility to **resist** the enemy while standing *firm in the faith*. The power of God, not our own will-power and determination, is the answer to thwarting the enemy's advances. Believers triumph over the enemy not by some great battle-plan or strategy of their own but by trusting God.

Peter reminded these believers that they were not alone in their trials. Believers *throughout the world* experienced *the same kind of sufferings*. When we come under attack of the enemy, we may think we're the only ones experiencing suffering, trials, or pain. We are not. Satan prowls around looking for anyone to devour. However, he does not have the power of our Lord. We can resist him, and he will flee (Jas. 4:7).

### KEY DOCTRINE: God's Purpose of Grace

Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end. (See Romans 8:28-39; 2 Timothy 1:12.)


## VERSES 10-11

In a doxology that concludes the entire letter, Peter praised the One who **called you to his eternal glory in Christ**. If God has called you to Himself, then He will also preserve you for His eternal purposes, no matter how many trials you face. Even though you suffer *a little while*, that suffering is temporary in light of the *eternal glory in Christ*. God has prepared a place with no heartache, pain, sorrow, or death (Rev. 21:1-7). He will deliver His people ultimately out of the reach of the lion prowling for their destruction.



God promised four things: He would **restore, establish, strengthen,** and **support** believers who endure suffering for His sake. All these terms together indicate that God would hold them through the difficulties they faced. Their adversary could not snatch them out of the Father’s hand.

With a final word of praise, Peter declared that all **dominion** belonged to the Lord. Though some may suffer temporarily and face discouraging circumstances in this life, God has an eternal perspective and His kingdom is **forever**. Satan is a real and personal adversary, but all dominion belongs to the Lord and He will strengthen us for the challenge.

 What are some practical things believers can do to recognize Satan's schemes? How do we resist his advances?

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Use multiple Scripture passages to understand a major doctrine.*

The Bible holds in perfect tension two things that seem contrary: God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility. The letters of Peter are no exception. This is particularly true with regard to salvation. We are called by God and effectually held by Him, but we are simultaneously urged to choose and maintain faith. Read the following Bible passages and take note of what they teach about these theological truths: Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 19:5-8; John 1:12-14; 3:16; Romans 5:9-10; 8:28-39; 10:12-15; 11:5-7; and Ephesians 1:4-23.

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# APPLY THE TEXT

- + Pastoral leaders are to serve with humility.
- + Younger believers demonstrate trust in God when they display humility.
- + Believers need to be alert, watchful of Satan’s schemes so they can resist him.

**○ Discuss with your group ways you can encourage your pastoral leadership. How can your group help your pastor know you are following his lead and that you are faithful to the task God has called you? Spend some time praying for your pastor.**

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**○ Do you have any warning signs that the adversary is prowling against you at the current time? What can you do to resist his advances? What promises can you stand upon that God will see you through an attack of the enemy?**

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**○ Memorize 1 Peter 5:8-9.**

## Prayer Needs

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# Be Equipped

*God fully equips believers for spiritual growth.*

## 2 PETER 1:3-8,16-21

Anglers delight in preparing their fishing tackle—whether it is stocking the tackle box, stringing the rod and reel, or getting their boat ready for a day on the lake. Firefighters constantly review, maintain, and practice using the equipment they need for answering calls. Every pursuit requires unique equipment. Christians also have the equipment they need for spiritual growth. They need to understand how to use that equipment.



**When have you felt under equipped to complete an assignment? How did that make you feel?**

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# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT


## 2 PETER 1:1-21

In his first letter, Peter dealt primarily with the suffering of Christians in Asia Minor. In his second letter, he emphasized practical Christian living. Our faith in Christ shapes us, and as we grow in our faith, we grow in our understanding of how God works out salvation in our lives from the moment we begin to trust Him.

The writer of 2 Peter identified himself as the apostle Peter (2 Pet. 1:1), using the Semitic version of “Simeon,” found also in Acts 15:14. Peter certainly had grown in his faith. Before the death of Jesus, he denied the Lord three times. On the day of Pentecost, he preached and saw 3,000 conversions. He took the gospel to Cornelius and the Gentiles. An experience with the resurrected Christ was only the beginning of his Christian walk. He grew and learned to use the gifts God had given him.

Peter also identified himself as an eyewitness to the transfiguration (1:16-18), and even quoted the words spoken at that event (1:17). He used his experience with Jesus to disciple other believers who had not seen Him.

Writing toward the end of his life, Peter emphasized faith and godly living. He warned against tolerating false teachers who led people away from the truth. He spoke of the urgency of Christ’s return and the impact it should have on believers living holy lives dedicated to the Lord. Peter wrote in a pastoral tone to the church that they might realize how equipped they were for spiritual growth.



**Read 2 Peter 1:3-8 and identify all the things in the passage that equip believers for spiritual growth. Then read verses 16-21 and find phrases that indicate the reasons Christians need to grow in their faith.**

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# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## THEIR SALVATION (2 PET. 1:3-8)

<sup>3</sup> His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. <sup>4</sup> By these he has given us very great and precious promises, so that through them you may share in the divine nature, escaping the corruption that is in the world because of evil desire. <sup>5</sup> For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with goodness, goodness with knowledge, <sup>6</sup> knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with godliness, <sup>7</sup> godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. <sup>8</sup> For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being useless or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### VERSES 3-4

God has equipped believers with everything they need for spiritual growth. This equipping comes to us by God's **divine power**. Spiritual growth is not achieved by human effort alone. His power through the Holy Spirit provides what we need for **life and godliness**. Everything needed for eternal life and for a godly life on earth comes **through the knowledge** of Christ. This word *knowledge* indicates a relationship or intimate acquaintance with Jesus. The God who has **called us by his own glory and goodness** gives us what we need to grow in faith.

God has given us many **great and precious promises**. As believers in Christ, we **share in the divine nature**. This does not mean we share His deity but that we will share in the moral excellence that belongs to God ("godliness," v. 3). This process begins with a salvation experience and continues until it reaches its fulfillment in the presence of Christ at His return. Peter further described this as **escaping the corruption that is in the world because of evil desire**. Salvation begins a lifelong process of sanctification.

### VERSES 5-7

God has provided everything necessary for spiritual growth and godliness. However, His provision does not absolve us from our responsibility in growing spiritually. We must **make every effort** to grow.

Peter listed a chain of virtues that promote spiritual growth. The first link is **faith**. Salvation comes by faith. Without faith we cannot please God (Heb. 11:6). To our faith we add **goodness** by choosing to live with moral excellence. On top of **goodness**, Peter encouraged the believer to build **knowledge**. We come to Christ as newborn babies needing milk, but we must move on to more solid foods (1 Cor. 3:2; Heb. 5:12). This comes through increasing our knowledge of the Word and our knowledge of God.

The chain continues in verse 6 with **self-control**. Self control is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23). What good would knowledge be if a person had no self-restraint? This possibly was a jab at the false teachers, who claimed to possess knowledge but were living sensual, out-of-control lives (2 Pet. 2:2,10). In addition to self-control, Peter encouraged adding **endurance**. This involved the ability to hold strong during a time of suffering or persecution. It involved continued obedience over a length of time. To endurance we are to add **godliness**. We have received everything we need for godliness (1:3) but still have to work it out in our lives. We have to work out what God worked into us.

Peter ended his chain with **brotherly affection** and **love**. The way we treat others reflects the strength of our faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, endurance, and godliness. This word *love* translates the Greek word *agape*. This is the kind of love God has for us, and it transcends all other virtues (1 Cor. 13:13).

***We come to Christ as newborn babies needing milk,  
but we must move on to more solid foods.***

#### **VERSE 8**

Peter's hope was that believers would continue growing in **increasing measure** in all of the virtues he mentioned in the previous verses. Spiritual growth keeps the believer from **being useless**. The word used here meant to be idle or lazy (1 Tim. 5:13; Titus 1:12).

Peter also encouraged believers not to be **unfruitful in the knowledge** of Jesus. The idle would have no fruit to show during harvest season. They remained idle during the planting and tending of the vines, so they had no fruit in the end. Peter had in mind those led astray by heretics and false teachers. Because they did not put forth the effort to grow in their faith, these believers could not distinguish true teaching from false teaching. The false teachers threatened to lead them astray.

Spiritual growth is important and is a work of God. However, we have a responsibility to put forth the effort necessary to grow.

Why is it necessary for believers to grow in spiritual maturity?

How do we supplement our faith with the virtues mentioned in verses 5-7?

JESUS’S IDENTITY (2 PET. 1:16-18)

<sup>16</sup> For we did not follow cleverly contrived myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; instead, we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. <sup>17</sup> For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased!” <sup>18</sup> We ourselves heard this voice when it came from heaven while we were with him on the holy mountain.

VERSES 16-18

Peter emphasized the assurance of Jesus’s identity as a factor in spiritual growth. He told his readers that even though they had all they needed at salvation, they still needed to remind themselves of the truths about who Jesus was and why He came. Greek and Roman religions contained *cleverly contrived myths* that had no historical basis. Christian doctrine is rooted in historical fact.

Peter was among the *eyewitnesses* of Jesus’s *majesty*. One of the places Peter witnessed the divine nature of Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration (see Matt. 17:1-13). After seeing the glory of Christ in the transfiguration, the disciples heard a voice coming to them *from the Majestic Glory*. This was another way of saying the voice came from God Himself. The heavenly voice said, *This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased*. These words accompanied both Jesus’s baptism (3:17) and His transfiguration (17:5). Peter reminded his readers that he had seen with his own eyes the majesty of Christ, and who could argue against his eyewitness account?


In verse 18 Peter emphasized that ***we ourselves heard this voice when it came from heaven***. He was not passing along secondary information. They had heard the voice with their own ears.

The eyewitness accounts of the biblical writers give us confidence to grow in spiritual maturity. Understanding Jesus’s identity and majesty as the Son of God helps us to follow Him confidently.

 **How can believers grow in their understanding of Jesus’s identity?**

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 **Why is it important that our understanding of Jesus’s identity be rooted in history?**

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**KEY DOCTRINE:** *The Scriptures*

All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation. (See Luke 24:44-46; John 5:39.)

**SCRIPTURE** (2 PET. 1:19-21)

<sup>19</sup> We also have the prophetic word strongly confirmed, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. <sup>20</sup> Above all, you know this: No prophecy of Scripture comes from the prophet’s own interpretation, <sup>21</sup> because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

**VERSE 19**

We have salvation and the historical veracity of Christ to help us grow in faith. Peter mentioned a third factor—Scripture. We have the ***prophetic word strongly confirmed***. The Old Testament pointed to Christ. If anyone doubted the eyewitness accounts of Peter, they should heed the prophetic words of the Old Testament about the coming Messiah.



To guard against the false teachers, Peter's readers needed to **pay attention** to these prophecies. Many voices competed for the believers' attention, but Scripture was (and is) the only supremely authoritative voice. They needed to follow the Word like a **lamp shining in a dark place**. Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path." It illumines the way when everything else around us is dark.

Peter further stated the Word would illuminate until the **morning star rises in your hearts**. Old Testament prophecies had connected a star with the Messiah (Num. 24:17). Revelation 22:16 presents the same idea of a "bright morning star" that represents the return of Christ. But what did Peter mean by *in your hearts*? Did he spiritualize the second coming of Christ and believe it would only happen in a spiritual sense? By reading the remainder of 2 Peter we can see this is not the proper interpretation. Peter expected a bodily return of Christ, and when He comes, He will shine the full light of His presence in our lives. His presence will transform us.

***We do not have the luxury of making  
Scripture say what we want it to say.***


#### **VERSES 20-21**

We can understand verse 20 in one of two ways. The word translated as **interpretation** can also be translated "origin." If we translate the word as *interpretation*, it would mean that no person could interpret scripture without the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Private interpretation devoid of the Spirit's instruction is unacceptable. If we translate it as "origin," the meaning is that people cannot make up their own meaning of Scripture. The meaning does not originate with them but with the biblical writers and the Holy Spirit.

Both of these interpretations are similar and true. Either way, Peter emphasized that all **prophecy of Scripture** originates with the Spirit of God. The false teachers distorted God's Word and put their own interpretations on par with the Scriptures themselves. We do not have the luxury of making Scripture say what we want it to say.


Verse 21 provides a clear example of how inspiration worked as fallible people wrote the infallible Scripture. Prophecies of Scripture came not **by the will of man**. Writers did not say, "I'm going to write some Scripture today." The Holy Spirit **carried** them **along**. He overshadowed

the process and guided their writing. Humans wrote, but the words came from God. Peter’s readers could trust the Word of God to guide them and develop their spiritual maturity because it was a divine book, living and effective (Heb. 4:12). Because Scripture was inspired by the Holy Spirit, it is a reliable and authoritative source of power for believers today.

 **Why can believers trust the authority and validity of Scripture?**

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 **How does the Bible help you grow spiritually?**

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Use other Scripture to help understand a Bible passage.*

Peter’s reference to his eyewitness account of Jesus’s transfiguration as a means of validating the historicity and divinity of Jesus is crucial to his refutation of the false teachers who were having a negative impact on local churches. Study the transfiguration accounts in Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; and Luke 9:28-36. Consider additional resources such as a Bible dictionary or trustworthy commentaries for each passage to help you dive deeper into your understanding of this significant moment in history.

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# APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers are to grow in their faith, building on the foundation of their salvation in Christ.
- + Understanding Jesus’s identity and majesty as the Son of God helps us to follow Him confidently.
- + Believers are to give their attention to Scripture as their means of spiritual growth.

 **As a group, evaluate the maturity level of the group as a whole. Would you be in infancy, adolescence, or adulthood? How could the group promote spiritual growth in ways that would benefit its members?**


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 **Review the three things God has given us to grow in faith: the foundation of our salvation, the historical veracity of Jesus’s life and ministry, and Scripture. How can you build on these things to continue growing in your faith?**

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 **Memorize 2 Peter 1:8.**

## Prayer Needs

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# Be Alert

*Believers should be on guard against false teachers and the division they sow.*

## **2 PETER 2:1-3,17-19; JUDE 17-23**

Many vehicles now contain three relatively new safety features. First is the lane departure system. This warns a driver when he crosses into another lane without a blinker. A second safety feature is lane-change assist technology, which warns a driver that a car is in his blind spot. Third is automatic braking technology, which warns the driver something has stopped in front of him. This may prevent an accident if the driver's attention is elsewhere.

- ☐ If you have any of these safety features in your car, how often do you notice them? What are some warning systems against false teaching?
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# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## 2 PETER 2:1-22; JUDE

The focal passages this week come from two different books of the Bible but with similar contexts. Both Peter and Jude encouraged believers to be on their guard against false teaching that threatened to divide the church and water down its health.

Peter’s first letter had emphasized suffering and how a Christian should approach it. His second letter started with an encouragement for Christians to continue growing in their faith (2 Pet. 1:3-11). One key element of that growth involved searching the Scriptures in order to discern and reject the messages of the false teachers. The true gospel came through eyewitnesses (1:12-21). The doctrines of the false teachers were based on their own cleverly devised myths. Peter confronted the false teachers (2 Pet. 2) and then taught the truth about the return of Christ (2 Pet. 3).

Jude was the brother of James, presumably the brother of Jesus (Jude 1). Though Jude is only 25 verses long, it is a powerful statement against false teaching. The letter addresses those who were called, loved by God, and kept by Jesus Christ (Jude 1). Jude wrote to those genuine believers who had sought to expose the teaching of false doctrine. He reminded them that no matter how popular the false teachings became, God would sustain them and keep them true to the gospel.



**Read 2 Peter 2:1-22 and the book of Jude. As you read the passages, underline verses that indicate the content of false teaching. List any points you find in these verses that might describe the false teaching and why it was so dangerous.**

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# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## FALSE TEACHERS (2 PET. 2:1-3)

<sup>1</sup> There were indeed false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, and will bring swift destruction on themselves. <sup>2</sup> Many will follow their depraved ways, and the way of truth will be maligned because of them. <sup>3</sup> They will exploit you in their greed with made-up stories. Their condemnation, pronounced long ago, is not idle, and their destruction does not sleep.

### VERSES 1-3

In the days of the Old Testament, *false prophets* had appeared alongside the true prophets of God (Jer. 8:11). Likewise, *false teachers* were spreading damaging teachings in Peter's day. He labeled their teaching as *destructive heresies*. The heart of this false teaching centered on *denying the Master who bought them*. They denied the redemptive work Christ. Perhaps they viewed Jesus only as a good teacher or an example to follow. Jesus was both of those things, but He ultimately came to redeem us from sin. By their disregard for the atonement of Christ, they would *bring swift destruction on themselves*.

The teaching of the false teachers was dangerous because it would lead many astray, following their *depraved ways*. The word *depraved* usually involved sexual sin. The false teachers lived by their own passions. They *maligned* the *way of truth*. They blasphemed the reputation of the church by claiming to know Christ but living by their own passions.

The motive of the false teachers was *greed*. The church supported its teachers financially, and those who taught a false gospel gave a message that many wanted to hear—you can follow Christ and not surrender your ungodly passions. They presented this message through *made-up stories*. They made up their own teachings about Christ rather than taking the word of the eyewitnesses (2 Pet. 1:16) and prophetic Scripture (1:20). They did this to *exploit* the church, fleecing believers of their material possessions.



How can believers become more sensitive to false teachings?

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## EMPTY PROMISES (2 PET. 2:17-19)

<sup>17</sup> These people are springs without water, mists driven by a storm. The gloom of darkness has been reserved for them. <sup>18</sup> For by uttering boastful, empty words, they seduce, with fleshly desires and debauchery, people who have barely escaped from those who live in error. <sup>19</sup> They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption, since people are enslaved to whatever defeats them.

### VERSE 17

The false teachers promised more than they could deliver. Two visual illustrations describe the emptiness of their teaching. First, they were like ***springs without water***. In an arid climate where water was essential, what could be more horrifying than going to a stream for refreshment only to find no water there? The promise of refreshment would leave the seeker thirsty. Jesus, on the other hand, promised a spring of water that would well up into eternal life (John 4:13-14). He promised to provide springs of living water flowing through them (7:37-38). And He promised that those who took a drink from His well would never thirst again. The false teachers could make plenty of claims but could not satisfy them.

Peter also compared the false teachers to ***mists driven by a storm***. These were the mists preceding a storm that the wind drove away before the rain fell. The ***gloom of darkness*** is the place of judgment (Matt. 8:12) where the false teachers and their empty promises will meet their judgment.


***False teaching preys on the weak and immature.***

### VERSES 18-19

The false teachers spoke ***boastful, empty words***. First, their words flowed from arrogance. Their pride caused them to think that they knew more than they actually did. Second, their words were meaningless. They tempted their listeners with ***fleshly desires and debauchery***, another reference to promiscuous sexual behavior. Telling new converts that judgment would not come (2 Pet. 3:3-7), the false teachers encouraged them to throw morality to the wayside and do whatever their own desires led them to do. False teaching preys on the weak and immature. It deceives with empty words and promises, and some people are not strong enough to resist its urges.

The empty promise of the false teaching was **freedom**. This involved moral and ethical freedom to follow their desires and to satisfy the cravings of their flesh. Since they did not recognize Christ's redemption from sin and did not believe judgment would come, the false prophets promised freedom from the moral restraints of law and moral behavior. They taught that people were free to live however they wanted to live.

Jesus also promised freedom (John 8:36). His freedom did not cast aside the law but fulfilled it. Only those who hold to His teaching will know the truth and really be free (8:31-32). Jesus's concept of freedom did not involve having no law; rather, it involved understanding it and holding to its principles. On the other hand, those who cast aside the law were slaves to sin (8:34). Peter echoed this idea by saying that those who followed false teachers were **slaves of corruption**. They thought freedom was theirs because they had cast off morality. But really, they had become enslaved to their own sin.

 **Why is it important to recognize the empty promises of false teaching?  
What makes identifying false teaching so difficult?**

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**DIVISION (JUDE 17-19)**

<sup>17</sup> But you, dear friends, remember what was predicted by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> They told you, “In the end time there will be scoffers living according to their own ungodly desires.” <sup>19</sup> These people create divisions and are worldly, not having the Spirit.


**VERSES 17-19**


Like Peter, Jude stood tall against the false teachers. He reminded his readers that **the apostles** had **predicted** false teachers would come to the church. Jesus had warned His apostles of this in Matthew 7:15-23. He said they would come as ravaging wolves who wore sheep's clothing. He encouraged them to recognize them and expose them by their fruit. Jesus also spoke of this in Matthew 24:11-12. He revealed that false prophets would come, deceive many, and lead them to lawlessness. This described what was happening in Peter and Jude's day. Paul also warned against false teachers (Acts 20:29-30; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:1-9).



Verse 18 reveals the specific content of the apostles' teaching. They said this delusion would happen **in the end time**. This reference to the end time did not mean this applied only to some far-off generation. The last days had dawned with the coming of Jesus and His death and resurrection (Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:20). Jude said **scoffers** would come. The Greek word literally meant to disparage or have a low estimate of someone or something. These *scoffers* mocked Christianity by words and deeds, **living according to their own ungodly desires**.

By opposing Jesus and encouraging immoral behavior, the false teachers caused **divisions**. False teaching is divisive. It separates people into various camps. A second characteristic of the false teachers is that they were **worldly**. They cared only about the present life. Their focus was on the material world without any thought of future judgment or eternity. A third characteristic of the false teachers was **not having the Spirit**. To not have the Spirit placed them outside of a saving relationship with Christ (Rom. 8:9). Their motives and teaching were wrong because their hearts were not right with God.

 What makes division within the church so dangerous?

 What makes worldliness in the church so dangerous?

**KEY DOCTRINE:** *The Scriptures*

Scripture reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. (See 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 4:12.)

## RESPOND (JUDE 20-23)

<sup>20</sup> But you, dear friends, as you build yourselves up in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, <sup>21</sup> keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting expectantly for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life. <sup>22</sup> Have mercy on those who waver; <sup>23</sup> save others by snatching them from the fire; have mercy on others but with fear, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.

### VERSES 20-21

Jude encouraged the believers, ***build yourselves up in your most holy faith***. Paul had encouraged believers to build on the right foundation (1 Cor. 3:10-15). *Faith* could be a reference to the personal faith present in the believer or the content of Christianity. Certainly spiritual growth involves both.

One of the ways we grow spiritually is by ***praying in the Holy Spirit***. Jude had accused the false teachers of not having the Spirit (v. 19). True believers have the Holy Spirit living in them. Prayer energized by the Spirit strengthens the believer to recognize and resist false teaching.

Jude encouraged the church to wait expectantly for the ***mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life***. When followers of Jesus faced judgment, they would receive *mercy*. The false teachers would receive judgment without mercy (Jas. 2:13). To wait meant more than to endure. It involved preparing oneself for the encounter with Christ.


***Unbelievers captured by false teaching  
need the gospel.***

### VERSES 22-23

Jude encouraged believers to ***have mercy on those who waver***. When people embrace false teaching and drift from the truth of the gospel, they need the compassion of genuine believers. We are not to react with hatred or ridicule.

Jude also encouraged true believers to ***save others by snatching them from the fire***. Obviously, we have no power to save people, but we do have the gospel that has the power to save (Rom. 1:16-17). Unbelievers captured by false teaching need the gospel. The fact that they were already in the fire meant they were under God's judgment in

their current state (John 3:18). With the phrase **but with fear**, Jude cautioned believers to keep their guard up in case they were tempted to join those held in bondage by false teaching. Showing mercy did not mean ignoring their ways but being wary of the teaching that had led others astray. In fact, Jesus encouraged **hating even the garment defiled by the flesh**. Sin stains and contaminates. Christians need to show mercy to those caught in false teaching, but they do not need to get so close that they become like them.

 **How can we show mercy to those caught up in false teaching without compromising the truths of the gospel?**

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Read, reflect on, and react emotionally to a Bible verse.*

Focus on Jude 17-23. Read the passage aloud several times. Each time, emphasize different words or phrases as you read. For example, in one reading emphasize the verbs. Then read the verse again, emphasizing all the commands. Emphasize still other words in a third reading. Take note of your thoughts. How does the verse move you emotionally? What feelings were evoked by the different words and phrases as you emphasized them?

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# APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers should be alert to false teachers and to any teachings that deny Christ.
- + Believers are to beware of teachers who live ungodly lives.
- + Believers should not be surprised when unspiritual people create division within the church.
- + Believers should respond to false teachers by continuing to grow spiritually and helping those in danger of believing their message.

 **What are some of the false teachings that tempt and threaten believers today? Discuss with your Bible study group some practical ways believers can hold each other accountable.**


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 **What are some ways you can guard yourself against the empty promises of those who falsely teach the Word? What is your plan for spiritual growth? How can you prioritize prayer and Bible study this week?**

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 **Memorize Jude 3.**

## Prayer Needs

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# Be Encouraged

*Believers should live in anticipation of Jesus's return.*

## 2 PETER 3:8-18

We spend a lot of time waiting for good things to happen. We wait for a vacation. We wait for a child's birth. We look forward to a new football season. Waiting builds anticipation but can give us time to make preparations. Waiting for a child's birth, we may get the nursery ready. The time leading up to a vacation can give us an opportunity to research and get the most from our destination. This week's Bible passage encourages us to live in expectation of Christ's return.



**Do you enjoy waiting, or would you rather eliminate the waiting?  
What could be the purpose in the wait?**

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# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## 2 PETER 3:1-18

In chapter 3, Peter turned his attention back to a problem caused by the false teachers. They did not believe that Jesus would return, and they did not believe judgment would come against them. Peter wanted his readers to remain certain about Christ’s return and to continue living holy and steadfast lives.

Peter heard Jesus speak of His return on multiple occasions. Jesus had told His disciples to be ready for His return at an unexpected hour (Luke 12:40). It would come like a thief in the night (Matt. 24:43). He indicated that signs would precede His coming (24:6-7). Some of those signs occurred during the lifetime of the apostles, and some of them have yet to happen. The signs did not give a timetable but rather encouraged readiness. Jesus indicated His return would happen on what seemed like a normal day (Luke 17:26-30). Marriage, buying, selling, and planting would all be on the agenda for that day. When Jesus returns, some will be prepared, but many will be unprepared.

If Jesus Himself taught that He would return visibly and physically, why had some believers given up on that thought? If Peter died in the mid-60’s, about 30 years had passed since the death and resurrection of Christ. Some wondered why Jesus would delay that long in keeping His promise of a return. Others questioned whether He would return because early Christians began to die without seeing the return of Jesus. Were they mistaken that He would return in their lifetimes? Peter wrote to encourage those in the “waiting room” that Jesus is coming back and to encourage them to prepare themselves for that day.

 **As you read 2 Peter 3:8-18, identify the promises related to Jesus’s second coming. Then identify the practical implications of those promises.**

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# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## CHRIST'S CERTAIN RETURN (2 PET. 3:8-10)

<sup>8</sup> Dear friends, don't overlook this one fact: With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. <sup>9</sup> The Lord does not delay his promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance. <sup>10</sup> But the day of the Lord will come like a thief; on that day the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, the elements will burn and be dissolved, and the earth and the works on it will be disclosed.

### VERSE 8

In the first seven verses of chapter 3, Peter reminded his readers they needed to take their beliefs from the words of the “holy prophets and . . . our Lord and Savior” as written by the apostles (2 Pet. 3:2). He also reminded them that scoffers would come and try to discredit the Word of God (v. 3). The subject of the scoffing was the return of Christ (v. 4).

The people who doubted Christ's return focused on the natural order, where the sun rose and set every day. They saw how creation worked like clockwork, and assumed it would always be that way. Peter drew from the Old Testament, specifically Psalm 90:4, to make his point. He said that a *thousand years* is only a *day* in God's sight. For God, who always has been and always will be, time is not a factor. He transcends time.

***God is a patient God because He is a compassionate God.***

### VERSE 9

God's timing is not like ours, and He has a reason for the delay of Jesus's return. His *delay* has a redemptive purpose. Peter attributed it to God's patience. Moses had reminded the people that the Lord was “a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth” (Ex. 34:6). In Ezekiel, the Lord asked, “Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? . . . Instead, don't I take pleasure when he turns from his ways and lives?” (Ezek. 18:23). Even the prophet Jonah remembered God's patience when He spared the people of Nineveh. He said, “I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in faithful love, and one who relents from


sending disaster” (Jonah 4:2). God is a patient God because He is a compassionate God.

The Lord does not want *any to perish but all to come to repentance*. His desire is that all would come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4).

**VERSE 10**

Peter used an image he had heard from Jesus to describe the *day of the Lord*. When Christ returns, He will come as a *thief* (Matt. 24:43-44). A thief does not announce the time of his arrival. For those unprepared for Jesus’s return, it will feel like a thief has invaded their house.

Three things will happen when Jesus returns. First, *the heavens will pass away with a loud noise*. Second, the *elements will burn and be dissolved*. Third, *the earth and the works on it will be disclosed*. In other words, the final judgment of God will complete history as we know it, and nothing will escape His judgment. He will create a new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21:1).

 What do these verses reveal about the Lord’s nature and purpose?

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**KEY DOCTRINE:** *Last Things*

According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. (See 1 John 3:2; Revelation 1:7.)

**HOLY LIVING** (2 PET. 3:11-14)

<sup>11</sup> Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, it is clear what sort of people you should be in holy conduct and godliness <sup>12</sup> as you wait for the day of God and hasten its coming. Because of that day, the heavens will be dissolved with fire and the elements will melt with heat. <sup>13</sup> But based on his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. <sup>14</sup> Therefore, dear friends, while you wait for these things, make every effort to be found without spot or blemish in his sight, at peace.



## VERSES 11-12

Peter did not defend the return of Christ for the purpose only of theological discussion. He understood that the return of Christ should change the way people live. It was ***clear what sort of people you should be***. Knowing that Christ will return and establish a new order, we believe that life on earth is not meaningless. Our goal is not merely to make it to the end of this life, because something is beyond death.

Peter encouraged believers to live in light of the fact that Jesus would return. This involves ***holy conduct***. The false teachers who denied Jesus's return lived fleshly and sensual lives, unconcerned about any future account given to God (2 Pet. 2:12-14,18-22). Peter encouraged believers to live lives that were set apart to God and different from those in the world. He called for ***godliness***. With the certainty of Jesus's return, believers needed to live in purity and devotion to God.

Verse 12 is another reminder of what Peter already stated in verse 10. The heavens would be ***dissolved with fire*** and the elements would ***melt with heat***. But how do we ***hasten its coming***? We hasten the coming of the Lord by living holy and devoted lives, sharing the gospel with the whole world. Christ had said we must preach the gospel to the whole world before His return (Matt. 24:14). Through godly living and a vibrant witness, we prepare the way for God's kingdom to come and His will to be done on earth as in heaven (6:10).

***Peter did not defend the return of Christ for the purpose only of theological discussion.***

## VERSE 13

Peter returned to the promises of God to create ***new heavens and a new earth***. The prophet Isaiah had mentioned this new creation in Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22. Revelation 21:1-7 speaks of this fulfillment. Peter emphasized that even though God would create a new world, it would be unlike the present one. The main difference was that it will be a place ***where righteousness dwells***. Isaiah had mentioned *righteousness* as a part of God's new creation (Isa. 32:16). God would create a world devoid of sin and complete in righteousness. The curse of sin would no longer rule over humanity (Gal. 3:13), and such a perfect place would be a joy for all believers to inhabit.

## VERSE 14

The hope of a new heaven and new earth without sin should create anticipation for what is to come. Instead of being anxious about Christ's return, believers ***wait for these things*** in a way that anticipates what God is about to do. Hopefulness should produce holiness. We should ***make every effort to be found without spot or blemish in his sight***. When Jesus returns, He longs to see Himself in us.

### ***Holiness is both a gift and pursuit.***

Is this type of holiness positional holiness (a work of God at the time of our salvation) or practical holiness (our pursuit to be holy in our daily living)? Perhaps we do a disservice in separating the two. Without a doubt, we cannot be spotless and blameless by our own human effort. We must receive the righteousness that is a gift from God through Christ (Rom. 5:17). John said it this way: "Dear friends, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when he appears, we will be like him because we will see him as he is. And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself just as he is pure" (1 John 3:2-3). Holiness is both a gift and pursuit. God gives us holiness through Jesus, but we also take action to live in a holy manner. If we walk in holiness while we wait on the return of Christ, we will have ***peace*** in difficult times.

- What can believers do to identify and overcome obstacles to holy living? What effect does the return of Christ have on your pursuit of holiness?
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## **STAND FIRM** (2 PET. 3:15-18)

<sup>15</sup> Also, regard the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our dear brother Paul has written to you according to the wisdom given to him.

<sup>16</sup> He speaks about these things in all his letters. There are some things hard to understand in them. The untaught and unstable will twist them to their own destruction, as they also do with the rest of the Scriptures. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, dear friends, since you know this in advance, be on your guard, so that you are not led away by the error of lawless people and fall from your own stable position. <sup>18</sup> But grow in the grace

**and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity.**

### VERSE 15

False teachers saw the delay in the return of Christ as an unfulfilled promise that called into question the teachings of Jesus. Peter encouraged believers to ***regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.*** This is a restatement of verse 9. God has delayed the coming of Christ to give time for people to repent and turn to Him. He is not untrustworthy but patient and compassionate. The Shepherd is still seeking the lost sheep (see Matt. 9:36-38).

Peter noted that Paul wrote something similar. We cannot know exactly which letter Peter intended or the passage that referred to the patience of the Lord. However, Paul had encouraged his letters to circulate among the churches for common reading (1 Thess. 5:27), and he wrote letters to churches in Asia Minor (Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians). The false teachers attacked the teachings of both Peter and Paul, placing these teachers in opposition to the apostolic witness.

### VERSE 16

Peter admitted that some of Paul's teachings were ***hard to understand.*** This was not because of a lack of clarity in Paul's writings but because people were ***untaught*** and ***unstable.*** They lacked the spiritual perception necessary to understand Paul's writings. Nothing was wrong with Paul's writings, but everything was wrong with those trying to ***twist*** them. They made them say what they wanted to say in order to justify their ungodliness. They also did this with the ***rest of the Scriptures.*** Peter was placing Paul's writings on par with Scripture, recognizing the authoritative nature of Paul's letters.

### VERSE 17

In light of the false teachers, Peter warned believers to stand firm in their convictions and to hold to the apostles' teaching. He told them to be on their ***guard.*** He encouraged them not to be ***led away*** by ***lawless people*** or ***fall*** from their ***stable position.*** Firmly grounded in the Old Testament and the writings of the apostles, Peter expected true believers to remain steadfast in their position and not to follow the teachings of those only trying to justify their own sinfulness.

VERSE 18

Peter concluded his letter with a challenge to **grow in the grace and knowledge** of Jesus. The answer for opposing false teaching was for believers to grow in spiritual maturity. This involves knowing the Scripture and living in holiness. Standing firm in the Word and standing firm in one’s walk is the best antidote to opposing false teaching.

Parents will sometimes buy clothes for their children that are too big in order to leave room for them to grow into it. We have plenty of room to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. Our relationship with Him needs to deepen, and it will do so as we desire for Him to receive **glory both now and to the day of eternity**. Spiritual growth is a today and tomorrow pursuit. It is something we will work toward and God will work in us until the day that Christ returns.

 How should the promise of Jesus’s return affect believers’ daily lives?

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**BIBLE SKILL:** Use a Bible dictionary to learn more about a major doctrine.

Read the entry for “second coming” in a Bible dictionary and make notes of your findings. Ask God to give you a fuller understanding of the implications of the second coming for your present life.

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# APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers are to live in expectation of Christ’s return.
- + Believers are to devote themselves to holy living as they await Christ’s return.
- + Believers can guard against false teachers by being intentional about growing in their knowledge of the Lord.

 **With your Bible study group, discuss spiritual goals you would like to achieve either before death or the return of Christ. What is standing in the way of achieving those goals? What are goals that obviously must be a work of God? What goals can you influence by your effort to walk in holiness?**


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 **What is your plan for standing firm in the Word? What is your approach in making it a daily part of your life? Do you read, memorize, meditate, and live the Word? What steps do you need to take in your life to continue growing more like Christ?**

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 **Memorize 2 Peter 3:9.**

## *Prayer Needs*

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# “Living Stones”: What Did Peter Mean

By Jimmy Draper

When we think of an ancient temple, the Parthenon on the Acropolis in Athens may come to mind. Or perhaps we envision Solomon’s temple. Essential to these massive structures was the cornerstone. Such a stone was structurally significant. In Jesus’s day people selected a cornerstone with care and laid it with great ceremony; the stone itself determined the lines of the architecture of the building. All the building took shape from the cornerstone. Today a cornerstone is merely decorative.

Peter spoke of Jesus as the Cornerstone. This imagery was not unique. Following the leadership of the Holy Spirit, though, Peter explained how believers are joined with the Cornerstone in both identity and task.

## THE CORNERSTONE

Seven hundred years before Christ, Isaiah saw the laying of the stone: “Look, I have

laid a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; the one who believes will be unshakable” (Isa. 28:16). In his day people understood Isaiah was referring “to the massive stonework of the Temple, symbolizing the Lord’s abiding presence among his people, a feature which was firm, unshakeable, [and] reliable.”<sup>1</sup>

Jesus’s response to the chief priests and elders pointed to the reality of this Cornerstone: “Have you never read in the Scriptures: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is what the Lord has done and it is wonderful in our eyes?” (Matt. 21:42). Referring to the Israelites during their exodus, Paul spoke of that Stone: “all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ” (1 Cor. 10:4).

Throughout, Scripture speaks of a mysterious, mighty, majestic, moving Stone. That Stone is Christ, and He is the Cornerstone

of the church. That was Peter's message; he called that Cornerstone the "living stone" (1 Pet. 2:4). The phrase appears to be an oxymoron, as if one were to say, "cool fire" or "bright darkness." We normally speak of someone as "stone dead." Yet the Bible calls the Lord both the Rock and the Life (Ps. 18:2; John 11:25).

This says something about Christ that can be stated no other way. In Him, the living Stone, are vitality, life, energy, growth, and movement. Only the phrase "living stone" can accurately describe our great Cornerstone.

Peter explained, however, that the Cornerstone is a rejected Stone. In the phrase "rejected by people" (1 Pet. 2:4), the Greek term translated "rejected" means to be disallowed after having been inspected. Although that Stone was in the eyes of God chosen and honored, people rejected and set aside that Stone.

The psalmist foresaw this: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone" (Ps. 118:22). This was Jesus's prediction of Himself: "It is necessary that the Son of Man suffer many things and be rejected . . ." (Luke 9:22). This was Peter's passionate proclamation of Him, "This Jesus is the stone rejected by you builders, which has become the cornerstone" (Acts 4:11).

But God's perspective is that Jesus is God's chosen and honored Cornerstone. From Him the spiritual temple takes its shape.

## **LIVING STONES**

Peter enlarged the scene. He described Christ building a temple using believers as living stones, being built to be a "holy priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:5). That great Cornerstone is a magnetic stone. Mysteriously, stones are drawn from all around that Cornerstone and into it. Dead, lifeless stones come into contact and are made alive. (See Eph. 2:1,4-5a.)

Peter gave a magnificent picture of the church's dignity and destiny. He described God building a spiritual temple with believers as the living stones of that edifice.

## **BELIEVERS AS TEMPLES**

Every believer, although a part of the whole, is a microcosm of the whole. Paul asked, "Don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you?" (1 Cor. 6:19a). That the Holy Spirit should condescend to indwell humankind is an utter amazement, but this is reality. Every believer is a temple, but every believer-temple becomes a brick in that temple that God is building. Every follower of Christ is a temple—and at the same time is a living stone in the vast, invisible temple of the ages.

As if looking through a kaleidoscope, Peter again described a changing image. The walls of the living temple dissolve and onlookers see inside its sanctuary. Those who a moment ago were living stones become sacred, holy priests serving in the temple. “You yourselves, as living stones, a spiritual house, are being built to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:5).

## BELIEVERS AS PRIESTS

According to Peter’s words, every believer holds a sacred office, a believer-priest within the temple of living stones. What does a believer-priest do? The Latin word for “priest” is *pontifex*, which comes from two words, one meaning “bridge” and another meaning “to make.”<sup>2</sup> The priest is one who makes or builds a bridge between God and man. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only great Priest, yet He has left believers as His under-priests, bridge builders for Him on earth.

Christians speak of the “priesthood of the believer.” The great truth of this doctrine is that Christ’s followers are to serve God as a way of life. Believers are in His living temple and part of His plan for the ages. This concept dignifies every aspect of each believer’s life.

No job is so menial or vocation so prestigious that this high calling does not dignify it. Believers are part of what God is doing.

Peter again refined his description as this scene dissolved into another. He had described believers inside that temple as both the living stones and believer-priests. But what are these priests offering? Each believer-priest is offering up “spiritual sacrifices” (v. 5). Paul explained that Christians are to “present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God” (Rom. 12:1). To become living stones is not enough. God sets us, His followers, in His temple as “a holy priesthood” offering ourselves as a living sacrifice to Him (1 Pet. 2:5). We set ourselves apart for His exclusive use. This is the miracle of living stones!

1. J. B. Taylor, “Cornerstone” in *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. J.D. Douglas (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1980), 319.

2. “Pontifex” in *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 2005), 964.

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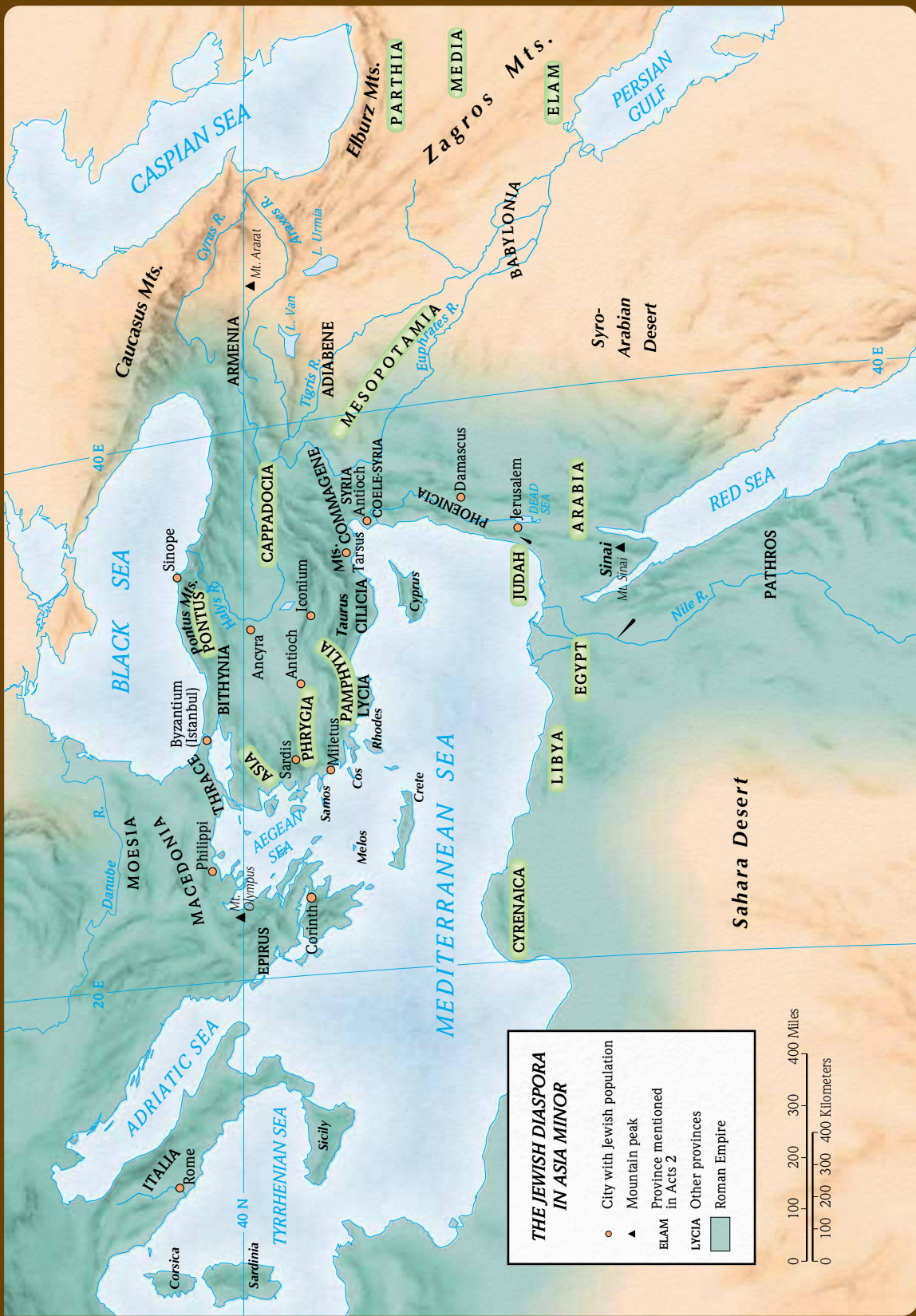
# COMING **NEXT QUARTER**

## **PSALM**

- Session 1: **God's Wisdom** (Psalm 1:1-6)
- Session 2: **God's Truth** (Psalm 119:1-16)
- Session 3: **God's Glory** (Psalm 19:1-11)
- Session 4: **God's Reign** (Psalm 96:1-13)
- Session 5: **God's Promise** (Psalm 132:1-14,17-18)
- Session 6: **God's Messiah** (Psalm 110:1-7)
- Session 7: **God's Deliverance** (Psalm 18:16-29)
- Session 8: **God's Faithfulness** (Psalm 105:1-11,42-45)
- Session 9: **God's Conviction** (Psalm 38:1-8,18-22)
- Session 10: **God's Forgiveness** (Psalm 32:1-11)
- Session 11: **God's Care** (Psalm 23:1-6)
- Session 12: **God's Greatness** (Psalm 139:1-4,7-16)
- Session 13: **God's Righteousness** (Psalm 5:1-12)
- Session 14: **God's Presence** (Psalm 42:1-11)

# The Jewish Diaspora in Asia Minor

"The Jewish Diaspora in Asia Minor" is adapted from the Holman Bible Atlas (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1998), 46. Used with permission.



## 1,2 PETER AND JUDE

Life can be hard. Sometimes, even knowing the right thing to do—much less trying to do it—can be a challenge. We're not sure which path to take or which relationship to nurture. We see the obstacles, but we don't see a clear path for conquering them. God understands, which is why He provided His Word and His wisdom to help us survive, and even thrive, in this world. For example, the original readers of 1,2 Peter and Jude were a lot like us. They were facing challenges and wondering how to filter those experiences through their faith. As you study these basic instructions for godly living, listen for God's voice and look for ways to apply these truths each day. He has something to say to you—and it will change your life.

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