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## Feeding the Sheep

**B**ecause our study this quarter is on 1 and 2 Peter, we are reading the words of someone who was with Jesus at most of the important moments in His ministry. Peter also had become a prominent leader among the earliest Christians. These facts alone would make his letters worth reading. But these letters take on added interest given that they were written to churches experiencing troubled times: they faced persecution from without and the danger of false teachers arising from within.

Peter warns that among the things that these false teachers will promote is doubt about the second coming of Jesus. “Where is the promise of his coming?” they will say, “for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (2 *Pet.* 3:4). Today, more than two thousand years later, we know the reality of that charge, don’t we?

Besides Peter’s warning about false teachers, the suffering the churches experienced is a topic that he returns to several times. This suffering, he says, mirrors the sufferings of Jesus, who took our sins in His body when He died on the cross (1 *Pet.* 2:24). But the good news is that Jesus’ death brought nothing less than freedom from the eternal death caused by sin, as well as a life of righteousness here and now for those who trust in Him (1 *Pet.* 2:24).

Peter says that Jesus not only died for our sins but will return to earth and usher in the judgment of God (2 *Pet.* 3:10–12). He stresses that the prospect of judgment

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should have significant practical implications in the life of the believer. When Jesus returns, He will destroy all sin and will cleanse the earth with fire (2 Pet. 3:7). Then Christians will receive the inheritance that God has been storing up for them in heaven (1 Pet. 1:4).

Peter has very practical words on how Christians should live. First and foremost, Christians should love one another (1 Pet. 4:8). He sums up his view by saying, “Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind” (1 Pet. 3:8, NRSV).

Peter’s epistles are also a fervent proclamation of the gospel, the central message of the whole Bible. After all, if anyone should know the saving grace of the Lord, it is Peter. This same Peter, who so openly and crassly denied his Lord (even with cursing), saying, “‘I do not know the Man’ ” (Matt. 26:74, NKJV), is the one to whom Jesus later said, “‘Feed My sheep’ ” (John 21:17, NKJV). These two epistles are examples of Peter’s doing just that—feeding the Lord’s sheep.

And, of course, any part of that feeding would include the great truth of salvation by faith in Christ, a theme that his fellow worker, the apostle Paul, so powerfully proclaimed. This is the truth of God’s grace. Peter knew about this, not just theoretically, or just as a doctrine, but because he had experienced the reality and power of that grace for himself.

As Martin Luther wrote in his commentary on Peter: “Consequently this Epistle of St. Peter is one of the grandest books of the New Testament, and it is the true, pure Gospel. For Peter does also the very same thing as Paul and all the Evangelists do in that he inculcates the true doctrine of faith, how Christ has been given to us, who takes away our sins and saves us.”—*Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1982), pp. 2, 3.

Jesus told Peter to feed His sheep. We are among those sheep. Let’s get fed.

*Peter has very practical words on how Christians should live. First and foremost, Christians should love one another (1 Pet. 4:8).*

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# How to Use This Teachers Edition

## Get Motivated to Explore, Apply, and Create

We hope that this format of the teachers edition will encourage adult Sabbath School class members to do just that—explore, apply, and create. Each weekly teachers lesson takes your class through the following learning process, based on the Natural Learning Cycle:

1. Why is this lesson important to me? (Motivate);
2. What do I need to know from God’s Word? (Explore);
3. How can I practice what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Apply); and
4. What can I do with what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Create).

And for teachers who haven’t had time to prepare during the week for class, there is a one-page outline of easy-to-digest material in “The Lesson in Brief” section.

Here’s a closer look at the four steps of the Natural Learning Cycle and suggestions for how you, the teacher, can approach each one:

**Step 1—Motivate:** Link the learners’ experiences to the central concept of the lesson to show why the lesson is relevant to their lives. Help them answer the question, Why is this week’s lesson important to me?

**Step 2—Explore:** Present learners with the biblical information they need to understand the central concept of the lesson. (Such information could include facts about the people; the setting; cultural, historical, and/or geographical details; the plot or what’s happening; and conflicts or tension of the texts you are studying.) Help learners answer the question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

**Step 3—Apply:** Provide learners with opportunities to practice the information given in Step 2. This is a crucial step; information alone is not enough to help a person grow in Christ. Assist the learners in answering the question, How can I apply to my life what I’ve learned?

**Step 4—Create:** Finally, encourage learners to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (*James 1:22*). Invite them to make a life response to the lesson. This step provides individuals and groups with opportunities for creative self-expression and exploration. All such activities should help learners answer the question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I’ve learned from this week’s lesson?

When teachers use material from each of these four steps, they will appeal to most every student in their class: those who enjoy talking about what’s happening in their lives, those who want more information about the texts being studied, those who want to know how it all fits in with real life, and those who want to get out and apply what they’ve learned.

# The Person *of* Peter



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Luke 5:1–11; Matt. 16:13–17; Matt. 14:22–33; Luke 22:31–34, 54–62; Gal. 2:9, 11–14.*

**Memory Text:** “But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, ‘Lord, save me!’ And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’ ” (*Matthew 14:30, 31, NKJV*).

Peter is the author of the two books (*1 and 2 Peter*) that bear his name. He was one of the early followers of Jesus. He remained with Jesus during the Lord's ministry here, and he was one of the first disciples to see the empty tomb. As a result, Peter had a wealth of experiences from which, inspired by the Holy Spirit, he could draw in order to write these powerful letters. “For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty” (*2 Pet. 1:16, NASB*).

Peter appears often in the Gospels, revealing both his triumphs and failures. He was the usual spokesperson of the disciples in their interactions with Jesus. After the Resurrection and Ascension, Peter became a prominent early church leader. The book of Acts talks about him, as does the book of Galatians.

Most important, Peter knew what it was to make mistakes, to be forgiven, and to move forward in faith and humility. Having experienced for himself the grace of God, he remains a powerful voice for all of us who need to experience that same grace, as well.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 1.

## Depart From Me!

When we first meet Peter, he is a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee (*Matt. 4:18, Mark 1:16, and Luke 5:1–11*). He had been working all night without catching a fish. But then he and his companions obeyed Jesus' command to return to the lake and to try again. How astonished Peter and the others must have been when they caught so many fish that their boats were sinking. What must have been going through their minds after this miracle?

**Read Luke 5:1–9. What do Peter's words to Jesus in Luke 5:8 tell us about Peter? That is, what insights do they give us about where he was spiritually?**

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Peter must have been impressed by what he knew of Jesus. Even before this miracle, when Jesus told the group to put down the nets, Peter—though incredulous because they had caught nothing—nevertheless said: “‘At Your word I will let down the net’ ” (*NKJV*). It seems that Peter must have known something about Jesus already, and this knowledge impelled him to obey. Indeed, evidence suggests that Peter already had been with Jesus for a while before this event.

Perhaps one key is in Luke 5:3, which talks about what happened before the miracle of the fish. “Then He [Jesus] got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat” (*NKJV*). Maybe the word of Jesus here was what had first impressed Peter so deeply.

However, after the miracle, Peter sensed something more in Jesus, something holy in contrast to his own sinfulness. Peter's realization of his sinfulness, and his willingness to admit it publicly, shows just how open he was to the Lord. No wonder he had been called! Whatever his faults, and they were many, Peter was a spiritual man who was ready to follow the Lord, regardless of the cost.

**Read Luke 5:11. What's the crucial principle here? What does this text tell us about what kind of commitment Jesus asks for? What should it tell us, too, that these fishermen were willing to abandon everything when their nets were full?**

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## Confessing the Christ

One of the grand moments in the story of Jesus occurred in a dialogue with Peter. Jesus just had been dealing with some of the scribes and Pharisees who had been challenging Him to give them a sign, something to prove who He was (*see Matt. 16:1–4*). Then, later, alone with the disciples, Jesus talked about the two miracles He had performed, in which He twice fed thousands with just a few loaves and fish. He did all this in the context of warning the disciples about the “leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees” (*Matt. 16:11*).

**Read** Matthew 16:13–17. What is happening here? What is the significance of Peter’s words to Jesus?

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Peter here spoke boldly of his faith in Jesus. And it’s clear from Matthew 16:20 that his confession of Christ as the Messiah was shared by the others, as well. This was to be a turning point in the ministry of Jesus, even though the disciples, including Peter, had much more to learn.

“The disciples still expected Christ to reign as a temporal prince. Although He had so long concealed His design, they believed that He would not always remain in poverty and obscurity; the time was near when He would establish His kingdom. That the hatred of the priests and rabbis would never be overcome, that Christ would be rejected by His own nation, condemned as a deceiver, and crucified as a malefactor,—such a thought the disciples had never entertained.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 415.

As soon as the disciples recognize Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus begins teaching that He must suffer and die (*see Matt. 16:21–23*), a concept that Peter could not accept. Peter goes as far as to “rebuke” Jesus. Jesus then turns to Peter and says, “ ‘Get behind Me, Satan’ ” (*Matt. 16:23, NKJV*). This is one of the harshest things that He said to anybody during His ministry; yet, He did it for Peter’s own good. Peter’s words reflected his own desires, his own selfish attitude about what he wanted. Jesus had to stop him in his tracks, right then and there (and though Jesus was really speaking to Satan, Peter got the message). Peter needed to learn that serving the Lord would involve suffering. That he learned this lesson is clear in his later writings (*see 1 Pet. 4:12*).

**How often do your personal desires clash with what you know God wants you to do? How do you decide what to do in those situations?**

## Walking on Water

In their time with Jesus, the disciples saw many remarkable things, although few of them can compare with the events described in Matthew 14:13–33, Mark 6:30–52, and John 6:1–21. Jesus used five small loaves of bread and two fish to feed more than 5,000 people. Again, what must have been going on in their minds after seeing something such as this?

**Read** Matthew 14:22–33. What’s the most crucial message we can take away from this story for ourselves to help us in our own walk with the Lord?

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With the feeding of the multitudes, these men had just witnessed the power of Jesus in a remarkable way. He truly had control over the natural world. That must have been what helped Peter make his rather bold, or even presumptuous, request: “ ‘Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water’ ” (*Matt. 14:28, NKJV*).

What an expression of faith!

Jesus, then, acknowledged this faith and told Peter to come, which he did, another expression of Peter’s faith. It would have been one thing to walk on water when it was calm, but Peter did so in the midst of a storm.

The usual lesson of the story is about taking our eyes off Jesus. But there’s more. Peter surely must have trusted in Jesus, or he never would have made the request and then acted on it. However, once he did act, he started to get scared, and in that fear he began to sink.

Why? Could not Jesus have kept Peter afloat regardless of Peter’s fear? Jesus, however, allowed Peter to reach the point where he could do nothing but cry out in his helplessness, “ ‘Lord, save me!’ ” (*Matt. 14:30, NKJV*). Jesus then stretched out His hand and did just what Peter had asked. The fact that “Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him” (*Matt. 14:31, NKJV*), when Jesus could simply have kept him afloat without the physical contact, surely helped Peter realize just how much he had to learn to depend upon Jesus.

We can start out in great faith, trusting in the power of our Lord, but when the situation gets frightful, we need to remember Jesus’ words to Peter: “ ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’ ” (*Matt. 14:31, NKJV*).



## Denying His Lord

**Read** Luke 22:31–34, 54–62. What lessons can we learn from Peter’s failures?

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Peter’s intentions were good. And, in fact, he showed more courage than did the other disciples. He actually followed Jesus in order to discover what would happen to Him. But in doing so, he decided to hide his true identity. This compromise, this deviation from the path of what is good and right, led him to deny his Lord three times, exactly as Jesus had warned him.

The story of Peter here is in a sad way very instructive on how devastating the result of compromise can be.

As we know, Christian history is soiled with the terrible results that happen when Christians compromise crucial truths. Though life itself often involves compromise, and we must at times be willing to give and take, in crucial truths we must stand firm. As a people, we must learn what are the things that we must never compromise, under any circumstances (*see, for instance, Rev. 14:12*).

According to Ellen G. White, Peter’s compromise and failure began in Gethsemane when, instead of praying, he slept, and thus wasn’t spiritually ready for what was coming. Had he been faithful in prayer, she wrote, “he would not have denied his Lord.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 714.

Yes, Peter failed terribly. But as great as his failure, God’s grace was even greater. “But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more” (*Rom. 5:20, NKJV*). It was Jesus’ forgiveness that made Peter one of the prime leaders of the early Christian church. What a powerful lesson for us all about the reality of God’s grace. What a lesson to us all that, despite our failures, we should press on ahead in faith!

Yes, Peter knew what it meant to be forgiven. He knew firsthand just what the gospel was all about, because he had experienced not just the reality of his human sinfulness but the greatness and depth of God’s love and grace toward sinners.

**How can we learn to forgive those who have greatly disappointed us, as Peter disappointed Jesus here?**

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## Peter as Church Leader

During the ministry of Jesus, Peter often acted in the role of leader of the 12 disciples. He was their usual spokesman. When Matthew lists the disciples, he says “first, . . . Peter” (*Matt. 10:2*). Peter also took a prominent role in the early church. It was Peter who took the initiative to appoint a disciple to replace Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus (*Acts 1:15–25*). On the day of Pentecost, it was Peter who explained to the multitudes that they were seeing the promised gift of the Spirit, poured out by God upon His people (*Acts 2:14–36*). It was Peter who, when arrested for speaking about the resurrection of the dead, spoke to the high priest and the assembled Jewish leaders (*Acts 4:1–12*). It was Peter who was led to Cornelius, the first Gentile to be accepted as a follower of Jesus (*Acts 10:1–48*). It was Peter whom Paul visited for 15 days when Paul first came to Jerusalem after his conversion (*Gal. 1:18*). Indeed, describing the circle of Jesus’ followers in Jerusalem at that time, Paul identifies three “pillars” of the church: Peter, James the brother of Jesus, and John the beloved disciple (*Gal. 2:9*).

**Read Galatians 1:18, 19; 2:9, 11–14. What do these texts tell us about Peter, even while he functioned so prominently in the early church?**

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Even as a church leader, even as someone clearly called of the Lord (Jesus told Peter, “‘Feed my sheep’” [*John 21:17*]), even as the one who received the vision about not calling “any man common or unclean” (*Acts 10:28*), Peter still had some important growing to do.

In the early days of the church, almost all the Christians were Jews, many of whom were “zealous for the law” (*Acts 21:20, NKJV*). In their interpretation of the law, eating with Gentiles was problematic because the Gentiles were considered unclean. When some Jewish Christians came from James at Jerusalem, Peter stopped eating with the Gentiles in Antioch.

For Paul, such behavior was an attack on the gospel itself. He saw Peter’s actions as frank hypocrisy, and he wasn’t afraid to challenge him on it. In fact, Paul used the opportunity to express the key teaching of the Christian faith: justification by faith alone (*see Gal. 2:14–16*).

**Though called of God, Peter had some blind spots that needed correcting. How do we respond when others seek to point out our own “blind spots”?**

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**Further Thought:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Call by the Sea,” pp. 244–251; “A Night on the Lake,” pp. 377–382, in *The Desire of Ages*.

From the fisherman’s early admission of his own sinfulness to his bold declaration of Jesus that “ ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’ ” (*Matt. 16:16, NKJV*) to his terrible denial of his Lord and even to his triumphs and mistakes as a leader in the church, Peter certainly had been a key player. Thus, under the flawless inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he could write what he did, not only from theoretical knowledge but from experience itself. He knew not only the saving grace of Christ but His transforming grace, as well: “Before his [Peter’s] great fall he was always forward and dictatorial, speaking unadvisedly from the impulse of the moment. He was always ready to correct others and to express his mind before he had a clear comprehension of himself or of what he had to say. But Peter was converted, and the converted Peter was very different from the rash, impetuous Peter. While he retained his former fervor, the grace of Christ regulated his zeal. Instead of being impetuous, self-confident, and self-exalted, he was calm, self-possessed, and teachable. He could then feed the lambs as well as the sheep of Christ’s flock.” —Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 334, 335.

Who among us can’t relate in some degree to Peter? Who hasn’t, at times, stood boldly for their faith? And who hasn’t, at times, failed miserably?

## Discussion Questions:

- 1 What does it tell us about the grace of God that even after such a shameful denial of Jesus, Peter would still come to play such a prominent and important role not just in the early church but in the Christian faith itself? (After all, he wrote part of the New Testament.) What lessons can we take from his restoration about how to deal with those who, in their own way, have failed the Lord?
- 2 In class, talk more about the dangers of compromise for the church. How can we know on what things we need to give and take, and on what things under no circumstances we can compromise? What are examples that we can find in church history of compromise that led to disaster? What lessons can we learn from these events?
- 3 Peter learned some lessons the hard way. From seeing his mistakes, how can we learn the lessons we need to learn but in an easier way than Peter did?

## The Canceled Funeral: Part 1

One day after school, I overheard my sister talking to a friend. “But it happened,” a girl said. “The man was dead, and now he’s alive. *How can a dead person come back to life?*” I wondered. Then I said aloud, “That could never happen.”

“It’s the truth,” my sister said. “The man was dead, and now he’s alive.”

I knew that God had raised people from the dead in Bible times. But miracles such as that didn’t happen anymore. Or did they? I knelt and prayed the prayer of Thomas. “Lord, if this is true, let me see it with my own eyes. Then I will believe” (*John 20:25, NIV*).

After a while, I forgot about this strange story about a dead man being raised to life.

When I finished high school, I applied to serve as a Global Mission pioneer before starting college.

A Global Mission pioneer is a layperson chosen by the church, given a small stipend, and asked to move into a community and teach the everlasting gospel while modeling the values of Christianity. Pioneers serve a unique and special role in starting new congregations in new areas among new people groups.

I was assigned to a remote region of central Nigeria where few outsiders ever went and where we had no Seventh-day Adventist believers. I settled in a village and began making friends. Most of the villagers worshiped idols, but some allowed me to share the gospel with them. One teenage girl named One-Ojo seemed especially interested in learning about God. I began studying the Bible with her.

Then one afternoon, a boy ran into my room shouting that One-Ojo was dead. “She died last night,” the boy said. “The family wants you to come before they bury her.”

Dazed, I slipped on my shoes and ran toward One-Ojo’s home. When I arrived, I found her body lying on a straw mat bound hand and foot and ready for burial. I stared at her as I thought about our Bible study just the evening before. *How could she be dead?* I wondered. I touched her arm; it was stiff and cold.

I asked for permission to pray before the family buried her. About twenty people in the room watched as I knelt beside her burial mat and prayed. I asked God to give this girl her life back to teach these people that God is all-powerful.

I had been praying for about an hour when I noticed beads of sweat on One-Ojo’s body. I laid my hand on her arm and felt warmth. Encouraged, I continued praying. Then One-Ojo sneezed.

*To be continued in next week’s Inside Story.*

## *The Lesson in Brief*

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► **Key Text:** *Luke 5:1–11*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Recognize his or her own inadequacy while trusting in Jesus' power to accomplish His mission.

**Feel:** Experience gratitude for the privilege of being called by Jesus to work for Him, despite a sense of unworthiness to be in close relationship with Him.

**Do:** Respond to Jesus' call to become a fisher of men and women, children and youth, willing to leave everything to follow Him.

► **Learning Outline:**

### **I. Know: Jesus Calls for Coworkers in the “Fishing” Business.**

**A** What makes us worthy to become coworkers with Jesus?

**B** Where does the power come from for bringing souls into the gospel net? How do we connect to the Source of that power?

### **II. Feel: Unworthy Sinners, Yet Grateful and Obedient**

**A** In what ways do we sense our unworthiness as sinners to be in close relationship with Jesus?

**B** How can we express gratitude for the privilege of being called to become coworkers with Christ?

### **III. Do: Answering His Call**

**A** Why is it important when we heed Christ's call to recognize that it is His sufficiency, not our own, that will grant success in His mission?

**B** Why must we leave everything in order to follow Jesus and fulfill His mission for souls?

► **Summary:** Peter's life was dramatically transformed when he realized his true condition as a sinner in the presence of Christ. Peter rendered willing obedience to Jesus' commands and witnessed the power of Christ to accomplish His mission independently of his skills as a professional fisherman. Peter learned that he must trust Christ's sufficiency alone.

## *Learning Cycle*

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Matthew 14:25–33*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Trusting in our own sufficiency leads to danger and despair. Once Peter realizes that his only hope is in Christ and calls out to Him for help, he is able to conquer the waves of despair that threaten his life and soul. Jesus still asks of us, as He did that day of Peter, “Why did you doubt?” (*Matt. 14:31, NKJV*). As the disciples did, we need to respond in worship, saying, “Truly You are the Son of God” (*Matt. 14:33, NKJV*).

Other experiences from the life of Peter also reveal his ongoing struggle with self-sufficiency and his slowness to learn the lesson that Christ tried to teach him. Only when he is humbled and broken after his denial of Jesus is he fully converted. It is then that he submits completely to the sufficiency of Christ, ready to become an instrument in Christ’s hands for the fulfillment of His mission.

**Just for Teachers:** The goal of this lesson is to lead the class to distrust their own sufficiency and to learn to rely on Christ’s sufficiency.

**Opening Activity and Discussion:** Have the class read Matthew 14:25–33. Discuss the setting in which this event takes place (*Matt. 14:13–24*) and what Peter should have taken away from these events. Ask the class to consider events in their lives that have tended to lead to self-confidence. Invite them to recall how things turned out before they surrendered themselves to Christ’s leadership and power in their lives. Based on subsequent events in Peter’s life, how effectively does he learn his lesson here? How effectively do we learn the lesson of trusting Christ’s power and sufficiency in our early experiences? Why does Jesus not give up on us just because we don’t learn the first time around?

### ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** Several important points are developed in Luke 5:1–11 that need to be emphasized to the students. Whom Jesus calls He equips; the power is from Him. The men He calls are professional fishermen, but He calls them to become apprentice fishers of people, a task for which they are ill-equipped. Jesus provides the evidence that He is the professional at fishing. If those whom He calls trust in Him rather than in their own methods, He will provide them with

a successful catch. They need to acknowledge His deity and their unworthiness. They also need to leave their own tools and methods behind in order to follow Him in humble obedience to His calling and equipping.

## Bible Commentary

### I. The Call to Service *(Review Luke 5:1–11 with your class.)*

As a professional fisherman, Peter lives his life on the water. He knows what it takes to catch fish, or so he believes. He also knows that people don't walk on water. Jesus overturns all of Peter's knowledge and self-sufficiency. To catch fish effectively one needs to have power over nature. Only Jesus has that power. He demonstrates it by filling Peter's nets with an overwhelming catch of fish after Peter toils all night without catching anything. (Later, Jesus also demonstrates His power again by walking on water.) Peter needs to recognize and acknowledge Jesus' deity and his own unworthiness so that he might work in association with Him (*Luke 5:8*). Peter also needs to learn to trust Jesus when He issues a command or instruction, because the Savior always knows exactly what He is doing and has the power to execute His own will. Peter also needs to leave behind all of his own tools and methods to follow Jesus, apprenticed to the Master Fisher of men and women (*Luke 5:10, 11*).

**Consider This:** How successful have we been at fishing for souls on our own, using purely human methods? How much more successful would we be if we trusted Christ's methods and power, and why?

### II. The Call to Confess Christ *(Review Matthew 16:13–19 with your class.)*

Jesus invites His disciples to confess their awareness of His identity (“‘Who do you say I am?’” [*Matt. 16:15, NIV*]). Peter, ever the brash spokesperson for the others, expresses his confession that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah), the Son of the living God (*Matt. 16:16*). Jesus declares that Peter could have known this truth only by revelation from the Father (*Matt. 16:17*). This acknowledgment is no credit to Peter, but it underscores the necessity for divine insight in coming to such a conclusion. Unfortunately, Peter seems to have become more confident of, and reliant on, his own correct understanding of Christ and His mission (*Matt. 16:21–23*).

**Consider This:** How can we be certain that we know Christ's true identity as Messiah? How can we attain a more intimate knowledge of Him and what He is able to accomplish in our lives?

### III. The Call to Humility (*Review Matthew 16:21–23 with your class.*)

As Jesus attempts to explain His mission to His disciples, Peter rebukes Jesus: “‘Never, Lord! . . . This shall never happen to you!’ ” (*Matt. 16:22, NIV*). Peter’s self-confident attitude is sharply reproved by Jesus as being expressive of the spirit of Satan. What does Jesus mean when He says to Peter, “‘You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns’ ” (*Matt. 16:23, NIV*)? What does Peter seem to have in mind in his rebuke to Jesus? How can we develop a more humble, self-effacing attitude? What does 1 Peter 5:5, 6 reveal that has helped Peter eventually to learn of the importance of humility?

**Consider This:** In what ways do our expectations of Jesus correspond to His own sense of identity and mission? How do we know when we are ready to learn the lesson of humility?

### IV. The Call to Faithfulness (*Review together Matthew 26:31–35, 69–75; Luke 22:31–34.*)

After three and a half years with Jesus, Peter still has not learned his lesson. Peter first denies Jesus’ prediction that all would forsake Him and flee, insisting that he never would do that. Then he denies Jesus Himself, insisting that he does not know Him. When Peter realizes that Jesus knows him better than he knows himself, he finally submits himself fully to God and allows God’s Spirit to control him. This full surrender results in his conversion, placing him in a position to become a spiritual leader for Jesus’ church and the writer of the two epistles that encourage others to be faithful to Jesus.

It is interesting to note that, after Peter has been active as a church leader and apostle for many years, he still exhibits some weaknesses for which he is reproved, according to Paul, in Galatians 2:11–14. Ellen G. White writes concerning this incident: “Peter saw the error into which he had fallen, and immediately set about repairing the evil that had been wrought, so far as was in his power. God, who knows the end from the beginning, permitted Peter to reveal this weakness of character in order that the tried apostle might see that there was nothing in himself whereof he might boast. Even the best of men, if left to themselves, will err in judgment.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 198.

#### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ How does Peter’s experience in these events of Matthew 26 and Luke 22 prepare his understanding for writing his two epistles?
- ❷ In what ways do we identify with Peter’s self-confidence and assertiveness? What will need to happen to us to bring our self-confidence under submission in order that we may learn at the Master’s feet?
- ❸ What role does Jesus’ prayer for Peter (*Luke 22:32*) play in his conversion?



How does this prayer enable Peter to strengthen his brethren through the writing of his two epistles? How does knowing that Jesus has prayed for us (*John 17:20*) offer us encouragement and hope?

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Remind the class that Peter's experience is not unique to him. He is just bolder and more outspoken in asserting himself in various situations than are his fellow disciples; so he receives more attention in the Gospels. None of the disciples understand what Jesus tells them about His mission (*Luke 9:44, 45*). Just as Elijah (*James 5:17*), they are human beings sharing the same weaknesses that we all do and needing the same divine power for victory over those weaknesses.

#### Thought Questions:

- ❶ What do I have in common with Peter? What is my potential for good or evil?
- ❷ How can I be strengthened by recalling that Jesus is praying for me, so that when I am converted I can, in turn, strengthen my brothers and sisters?

**Activity:** Have the class consider praying specifically for those in the church, including their own members who may be struggling with Satan's temptations. Encourage one another to faithfulness.

**Alternate Activity:** Discuss with the class the call to discipleship (fishing for people) that Jesus makes to Peter, Andrew, James, and John in *Luke 5:1–11* (compare with *Matt. 4:18–22*). Plan a class project that would involve attracting people into the gospel net.

### ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** We have an opportunity here to relate to Peter's life and experience. Note the ways in which Jesus reaches out to encourage Peter rather than to criticize him for his failures, even in the midst of predicting some of them. What experiences can class members cite as evidence that Jesus is there to encourage them, despite their frequent failures?

**Activity:** Create a chart, if supplies are available, of the ups and downs, the successes and failures, in Peter's life, as recorded in the New Testament. Alternately, if supplies are not available, ask the class to list these aspects of Peter's life. What pattern emerges? What relation does the pattern have to Peter's conversion experience? How is this instructive for us?

# An Inheritance Incorruptible



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** 1 Pet. 1:1, 2; John 3:16; Ezek. 33:11; 1 Pet. 1:3–21; Lev. 11:44, 45; 1 Pet. 1:22–25.

**Memory Text:** “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart” (1 Peter 1:22, NIV).

Whenever one studies the Bible, particularly focusing on one book or even a section of a book, a few questions need to be answered, if possible.

First, it would be good to know who the intended audience was. Second, perhaps even more important, it would be good to know what the precise reason for the writing was. What was the particular issue (if any) that the author wanted to address (such as Paul's writing to the Galatians in regard to the theological errors being taught about salvation and the law)? As we know, much of the New Testament was written as epistles, or letters, and people usually write letters in order to convey specific messages to the recipients.

In other words, as we read Peter, it would be good to know, as much as possible, the historical context of his letter. What was he saying, and why? And of course, most important of all: *What message can we (to whom, under inspiration, it was written, as well) take from it?*

And as we will soon see, even in the first few verses, Peter has a lot of important truth to reveal to us today, centuries removed from when he wrote.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 8.

## To the Exiles

If you were given a piece of paper that began, “Dear Sir,” you would realize that you were reading a letter. And you would assume that the letter came from somebody you probably weren’t close to.

Just as modern letters have a standard way to begin, so do ancient letters. First Peter begins as any ancient letter would. It identifies the author and those to whom it was sent.

**Read 1 Peter 1:1. What can we learn from this one verse that helps to give us a bit of context?**

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Peter clearly identifies himself. His name is the first word in the letter. Yet, he immediately defines himself as “an apostle of Jesus Christ.” Thus, as Paul often did (*Gal. 1:1, Rom. 1:1, Eph. 1:1*), Peter right away establishes his “credentials,” emphasizing his divine calling. He was an “apostle;” that is, “one sent,” and the One who sent him was the Lord Jesus Christ.

Peter identifies a region where his letter was directed: Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. These are all regions in Asia Minor, roughly equivalent to the part of modern Turkey east of the Bosphorus.

Debate exists about whether Peter was writing mostly to Jewish believers or to Gentile believers. The terms Peter used in 1 Peter 1:1, *sojourners/exiles* and *dispersion [diaspora]* (*NRSV*), are terms that naturally belong to Jews living outside of the Holy Land in the first century. The words *chosen* and *sanctified* in 1 Peter 1:2 are suited to both Jews and Christians alike. Describing those outside of the community as “Gentiles” (*1 Pet. 2:12, 4:3*) also underlines the Jewish character of those to whom Peter writes.

Some commentators argue, in response, that what Peter says in 1 Peter 1:18 and 4:3 would be more appropriately said to Gentile converts to Christianity than to Jewish ones. After all, would Peter really have written to Jews about the “futile ways inherited from your ancestors” (*NRSV*)? Or would he have said to Jewish readers, “For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries” (*1 Pet. 4:3, NKJV*)?

What’s more crucial for us, though, isn’t so much who the audience was but, rather, what the message says.

## Elected

**Read 1 Peter 1:2.** What else does this tell us about those to whom Peter had been writing? What does he call them?

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Whether writing to specifically Jewish or Gentile believers, Peter was sure about one thing: they were “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (*1 Pet. 1:2*).

Here, though, one needs to be careful. This does not mean that God predestined some people to be saved and some to be lost, and as good fortune would have it, the ones Peter was writing to happen to be some of those chosen or elected by God for salvation, while others were chosen by God to be lost. That’s not what the Bible teaches.

**Read 1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9, John 3:16, and Ezekiel 33:11.** How do these verses help us to understand what Peter meant when he called these people the “elect”?

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Scripture makes it clear that it was God’s plan for everyone to be saved, a plan instituted in their behalf even before the Creation of the earth: “just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world” (*Eph. 1:4, NKJV*). “All” are “elect” in the sense that God’s original purpose was for everyone to be saved and no one to be lost. He predestined all humanity for eternal life. This means that the plan of salvation was adequate for everyone to be included in the atonement, even if not everyone would accept what that atonement offered him or her.

God’s foreknowledge of the elect is simply His knowing beforehand what their free choice would be in regard to salvation. This foreknowledge in no way forced their choice any more than a mother knowing beforehand that her child will choose chocolate cake instead of green beans meant that her foreknowledge of the choice forced the child to make it.

**What kind of assurance can you get from the encouraging truth that God has chosen you to be saved?**

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## Key Themes

**Read** 1 Peter 1:3–12. What is Peter’s main message in these verses?

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In his greeting to his readers in 1 Peter 1:1, 2, Peter already has mentioned the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (*1 Pet. 1:2*). The three members of the Godhead form the subject of 1 Peter 1:3–12. The Father and the Son are the topic of 1 Peter 1:3–9, and the Holy Spirit is prominent in 1 Peter 1:10–12.

As he writes about the Father and Son and the work of the Holy Spirit, Peter introduces many of the themes that he will come back to.

Christians, Peter begins (*1 Pet. 1:3*; see also *John 3:7*), have been born anew. Their whole lives have been transformed by Jesus’ resurrection and the extraordinary inheritance that awaits Christians in heaven (*1 Pet. 1:3, 4*). Here, as in so many other places in the New Testament, the resurrection of Jesus is key to the Christian hope.

This hope gives Christians a reason to rejoice, despite the fact that many of those reading 1 Peter are suffering. This suffering tests and refines their faith, just as fire tests and refines gold. Even though Peter’s readers have not seen Jesus during His earthly ministry, they love Him and believe in Him. And the outcome of their faith in Him is salvation and the promise of “an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you” (*1 Pet. 1:4, NKJV*).

Peter also lets them know that the prophets of old had predicted the “grace that would come to you” (*1 Pet. 1:10*). The prophets of the Old Testament “inquired and searched” (*1 Pet. 1:10, NKJV*) about the salvation that these people were now experiencing in Jesus.

As they suffer persecution for their faith, Peter points out that they are part of a much wider conflict between good and evil. In the end, he is seeking to help them stay faithful to the truth, even amid trials.

**First Peter 1:4 says that there is an inheritance “reserved in heaven for you.” Think about that on a personal level; there is a specific place reserved in heaven just for you, personally. Then how should you personally respond to this wonderful promise?**

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## Living the Life of Salvation

**Read 1** Peter 1:13–21. According to this passage, what should motivate Christian behavior?

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The word *therefore*, which begins 1 Peter 1:13, NKJV, shows that what Peter will say next grows out of what he had just said. As we saw in yesterday's study, Peter just had been talking about the grace of God and the hope that Christians have in Jesus Christ (*1 Pet. 1:3–12*).

As a result of this grace and hope, Peter urges his readers to “gird up the loins of your mind” (*1 Pet. 1:13*). That is, as a response to the salvation that they have in Jesus, they must prepare their minds in order to stand firm and be faithful (*1 Pet. 1:13*).

**Read 1** Peter 1:13. What does it mean to rest your hope fully upon the grace revealed in Jesus?

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No question, Peter tells them their hope rests only in Jesus. But he then emphasizes that a certain level of behavior is expected from Christians as a consequence of their salvation. He notes three of the great motivations that lie behind Christian behavior: the character of God (*1 Pet. 1:15, 16*), the coming judgment (*1 Pet. 1:17*), and the cost of redemption (*1 Pet. 1:17–21*).

The first thing that will motivate Christian behavior is the character of God. This character can be summed up this way: God is holy. Peter quotes from Leviticus 11:44, 45 when he says, “Be ye holy; for I am holy” (*1 Pet. 1:16*). Therefore those who follow Jesus must also be holy (*1 Pet. 1:15–17*).

A second motivation for Christian behavior is found in the realization that God, who is holy, will judge everyone impartially, according to what each has done (*1 Pet. 1:17*).

A third motivation arises from the great truth that Christians are redeemed. This means that they have been bought with a price, a very high price: the precious blood of Christ (*1 Pet. 1:19*). Peter emphasizes that the death of Jesus was not an accident of history but something established before the foundation of the world (*1 Pet. 1:20*).

**What motivates you to be a Christian? What would you answer, and why, if someone asked you, *Why are you a Christian?* Bring your answers to class on Sabbath.**

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## Love One Another

Peter next steers Christians to the ultimate expression of what living a holy and faithful life will be like.

**Read** 1 Peter 1:22–25. What crucial point is he making here about what it means to be a Christian?

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Peter’s starting point is that Christians are already purified (“Seeing ye have purified . . .”) and are living in obedience to the truth (*1 Pet. 1:22*). The verb “purify,” or “cleanse,” is closely related to the words *holy* and *holiness*, which link back to what Peter wrote a few verses earlier (*1 Pet. 1:15*). Through their commitment to Jesus, and through their baptism (*compare 1 Pet. 3:21, 22*), Christians have purified themselves by setting themselves aside for God, and they do this by obeying the truth.

This change in their lives results in another change. They now find themselves in a close relationship with others who share a similar worldview. These relationships are so close that Peter uses the language of family to describe them. Christians are to act out of brotherly and sisterly love. The Greek word *philadelphia* used in 1 Peter 1:22, when he talks about the “love of the brethren,” means literally “love of brother/sister.” It is the love that families have for one another.

There are several different words in Greek that are translated “love”: *philia* (friendship), *eros* (the passionate love of a husband and wife), *agape* (a pure love that seeks the good of the other). The word Peter uses when he writes “love one another fervently” (*1 Pet. 1:22, NKJV*) is linked to *agape*—which usually means the pure love that seeks the good of others. That’s certainly why he added the phrase to love one another “with a pure heart” (*1 Pet. 1:22, NKJV*), the kind of heart that comes from being “born again” (*1 Pet. 1:23; see also 1 Pet. 1:3*) through the incorruptible Word of God. This kind of love comes only from God; it’s not what a selfish, self-centered, unregenerate heart will manifest, which is surely why Peter puts such an emphasis on being purified and on “obeying the truth” (*1 Pet. 1:22*). The truth is not just something believed; it must be lived.

**How can we learn to be more loving? What choices must we make in order to be able to manifest the kind of love that comes from a “pure heart”?**

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**Further Thought:** Read Ellen G. White, “Christ the Way of Life,” pp. 365–368; “Perfect Obedience Through Christ,” pp. 373–376, in *Selected Messages*, book 1.

It’s amazing how rich and deep this first chapter of Peter is and how much ground it covers. Peter begins his epistle with a meditation on the character of the Godhead, bringing in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father has provided a Savior in His Son, Jesus Christ, and we are elected in Him for sanctification and obedience. We come to love Jesus, and in Him we rejoice with exalted joy because, through His death and resurrection, we have the promise of an “inheritance incorruptible” in heaven. Even amid trials, then, we can rejoice greatly in the salvation offered us in Christ. “His [Peter’s] letters were the means of reviving the courage and strengthening the faith of those who were enduring trial and affliction, and of renewing to good works those who through manifold temptations were in danger of losing their hold upon God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 517. Meanwhile, the Holy Spirit worked through the prophets to describe the days in which Peter and his readers live. As a consequence, Christians should live holy lives, filled with obedience to the truth, in communities that are characterized by the kind of love that comes from a “pure heart.”

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ In class, go over your answers to the question at the end of Wednesday’s study: What motivates us to be Christians? What do your answers share in common? How do they diverge?
- ❷ Twice in this first chapter (*1 Pet. 1:3, 21*), Peter brought up the resurrection of Jesus. What is it about the Resurrection that is so crucial to our faith?
- ❸ Peter talked about an “inheritance incorruptible” (*see also Dan. 7:18*). What does that mean? Think about all the things in this world and this life that fade away or that can be destroyed instantly. What should this tell us about how wonderful our promised inheritance really is?
- ❹ How can our faith grow amid trials? That is, what choices can we make to help us to learn from the things we suffer?



## The Canceled Funeral: Part 2

Everyone in the room heard One-Ojo sneeze, too, and they ran outside terrified. I continued praying, and One-Ojo opened her eyes. She struggled to free herself from the ropes that bound her. I called her brother to come and untie the burial ropes.

When her brother saw One-Ojo struggling, he began shaking with fear. But I urged him to untie his sister. When she was freed, we helped her to a chair. The mourners who had fled now crowded around the doorway and windows to see the dead girl who was now alive.

One-Ojo asked for food, and someone brought it to her. Soon her strength returned, and we praised God together. Then I told the family that God had healed their daughter in answer to prayer, but that God was not willing to share His glory with witchcraft. I warned them not to put herbs on One-Ojo according to their custom, for this was a form of witchcraft, and it would not please God. The girl's mother and brother nodded in agreement.

It was dark when I returned to my room. My legs were shaking, and I felt weak and exhausted. I knelt down and prayed, "God, today my 'Thomas prayer' has been answered. I believe. Use me as You will. I'm Yours." Then I fell into bed and slept soundly.

About one o'clock in the morning, a loud knock at my door woke me. "Pastor Larie, come!" a woman's voice begged. I opened the door and found One-Ojo's mother standing there. "Come!" she begged. "One-Ojo is dead again."

"How can that be?" I asked. "God's power never fails." I hurried with her to where One-Ojo lay on her bed. I checked her pulse and her breathing. She was dead—again. As I knelt down beside her, I smelled the witch doctor's herbs that someone had spread on her body.

"Who put those herbs on her body?" I asked. One-Ojo's mother said that her husband must have done it, for he was the only other person in the house.

"God raised her from the dead," I said, "and He deserves the glory for her resurrection. But someone has dishonored God and applied these herbs to her, and now she is dead again!"

I turned and prayed as the family waited silently. A few minutes later One-Ojo opened her eyes and sat up. I stayed with her a few minutes. Then before I returned home, I warned the family again not to allow anyone to touch her body with the witch doctor's herbs. Her mother and brother nodded vigorously. Then I went home and fell into bed, exhausted.

*To be continued in next week's Inside Story.*

## *The Lesson in Brief*

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► **Key Texts:** *1 Peter 1:3–9, 13–21*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Realize that in Christ believers are born again into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

**Feel:** Experience the joy of salvation.

**Do:** Live as part of God's covenant people, called by God to lives of faith, hope, love, and holiness.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: The New Birth Into a Living Hope**

**A** What does it mean to be born again through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead?

**B** What is implied by being a part of God's covenant community, called to holiness?

**II. Feel: No Longer Aliens but Born Into the Household of God**

**A** How does it feel to be an alien rather than a member of a household or community?

**B** How have we experienced the joy of receiving the goal of our faith—the salvation of our souls?

**III. Do: Living as Members of the Covenant Community**

**A** What qualities does Peter commend to those who are called to be members of the new covenant community of faith?

**B** What motivation does Peter provide for living lives of holiness and reverent fear?

► **Summary:** Peter reminds his readers—who are strangers scattered in the world—that they are in continuity with the Old Testament people of God, having been redeemed from their futile ways of life and born again to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus. Therefore, they should behave like members of the community of faith in view of the judgment coming at Christ's return.

## *Learning Cycle*

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *1 Peter 1:3–5*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Through God’s mercy, we have received a new birth, leading to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This hope promises us an imperishable, undefiled, and unfading inheritance. God has reserved it in heaven for us who have been preserved by His power through faith for a salvation that is soon to be revealed at Christ’s return. We find great joy in this hope, even when we experience various trials. The development of our characters in and through these trials will result in praise, glory, and honor to God when Christ is revealed.

**Just for Teachers:** It seems evident that Peter writes in 1 Peter 1:1 to people who are scattered through the provinces of Asia Minor, either as a result of persecution or through purposeful resettlement by the Roman authorities. In either case, they would have been dispossessed of their homes and have felt like aliens among strange peoples. Such people need hope in an inheritance that is enduring. Peter offers such hope to his readers.

**Opening Activity and Discussion:** Have the class read Psalm 64. Discuss the setting in which this psalm of David is apparently written and how Peter’s readers might have identified with David’s sense of isolation and desire for hope and salvation from God. Encourage the class members to recall times they may have felt similar disenfranchisement from their communities and a desire for hope in God and His salvation. What Bible promises have provided hope and joy at such times?

### ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** Commentator Karen H. Jobes argues rather convincingly in favor of a program of Roman colonization under Emperor Claudius as a plausible explanation for Peter’s description of his addressees as “strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (*1 Pet. 1:1*). “The entire book of 1 Peter is both framed [*1 Pet. 1:1; compare with 1 Pet. 5:13*] and saturated with the terms of exile and foreignness.”—*1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), p. 39. If this theory is correct, the believers whom Peter addresses may not have had Roman citizenship to protect them from what was most likely coerced

exile and disenfranchisement in the interest of populating the emperor's newly established colonies in Asia Minor. Peter's description of their state as having been "chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" and "birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (*1 Pet. 1:2, 3, NIV*) points them to God's ultimate purpose for their situation. They are to live as foreigners and strangers in the earth, for their inheritance is "reserved in heaven for you . . . a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (*1 Pet. 1:4, 5, NASB*).

## Bible Commentary

### I. Chosen by God's Foreknowledge (*Review 1 Peter 1:1, 2 with your class.*)

Peter addresses the recipients of his first letter by reminding them that although they are aliens in the provinces where they are currently residing, God has selected them according to His divine foreknowledge. They have been set apart by the Spirit of God for a special purpose, namely, for obedience and for being sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ. The latter seems to be an allusion to the establishment of the Mosaic covenant in which the people pledged obedience to the covenant. The covenant was then ratified by sprinkling the blood of the sacrifice on the people (*see Exod. 24:3–8*). Peter then expresses for his readers a wish for grace and peace to be with them in full measure.

**Consider This:** In what ways might we be considered aliens in this world? (*See Heb. 11:9, 10, 13–16.*) How do we demonstrate our calling and status by our lifestyles?

### II. Begotten Again to a Living Hope (*Review 1 Peter 1:3–9 with your class.*)

New life begins with a new conception. This life comes from God's mercy for undeserving sinners. The result for the believer is a living hope, which derives from Jesus' own resurrection from the dead. This hope is grounded in an inheritance that is reserved in heaven for those who are protected by God's power through faith. It climaxes in a salvation that is ready to be revealed at the return of Christ on the last day. Such a hope produces great joy in the believer despite various trials that put faith to the test, and it will result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Indescribable joy is the experience of all who will attain the goal of their faith: the salvation of their souls.

**Consider This:** How may I experience the hope and joy of one who has been born again? What are the evidences of this in my life?

### III. The Gospel Proclaimed by the Prophets (*Review together 1 Peter 1:10–12.*)

The Old Testament prophets predicted the grace that would come to Peter's readers by the suffering of Jesus Christ and His subsequent glorification at His resurrection and ascension. They would have liked to understand these matters better themselves, but they were informed that in their prophetic ministry they were serving not themselves but the believers represented by Peter's readers who would come afterward. So, the good news that they proclaimed was not fully understood by them—or even by angels. But now that Christ has come, the gospel of grace is more fully grasped by Peter's readers than it ever was by the prophets, despite the fact that they had the Spirit of Christ in them (*1 Pet. 1:11*).

**Consider This:** How does this proclamation of grace apply to us, Peter's readers, today? How may we understand Peter's words to apply even more to our situations today than to his own day?

### IV. The Call to Holy Living (*Review 1 Peter 1:13–25 with your class.*)

Peter's readers have been ransomed by the precious blood of Jesus from the empty way of life they inherited from their ancestors. In view of this fact, Peter appeals to them to prepare their minds for action by being fully sober and setting their hopes completely on the grace that will be brought to them at the revelation (visible return) of Jesus Christ. They are called to be holy in all of their conduct, because God, who called them, is holy. They need to live in conscious awareness of the coming judgment, with due respect for the Father, who judges impartially according to each one's work (*1 Pet. 1:17*). This consciousness implies that they will show sincere mutual love out of a pure heart, because they have been born again through the living and enduring Word of God.

Ellen G. White observes, "God has commanded us, 'Be ye holy; for I am holy;' and an inspired apostle declares that without holiness 'no man shall see the Lord.' Holiness is agreement with God. By sin the image of God in man has been marred and well-nigh obliterated; it is the work of the gospel to restore that which has been lost; and we are to cooperate with the divine agency in this work."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 743.

#### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Unless one has something to live for in the future, what motivates one's present course of action?
- ❷ What value does Peter place on the inheritance he holds out before his readers?
- ❸ What value does Peter place on the readers themselves, based on the price paid

for their redemption? What obligation does this price, in turn, place upon Peter's readers?

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Remind the class of the experiences of other biblical characters—such as Abraham, Joseph, David, and Daniel—who went through the experience of being foreigners in a strange land and who learned to rely on the promises of God for an inheritance that yet lay in the future. Have the class read together Hebrews 11:8–10, 13–16, and discuss the attitude that instilled faith and hope in the patriarchs. Compare our own situation, as alluded to in Hebrews 11:39, 40.

#### Thought Questions:

- ❶ What is the essence of the gospel announced by the Old Testament prophets and proclaimed by the Holy Spirit?
- ❷ What are some of the ways in which you are conscious of the price paid to ransom us from our empty ways of life? What difference does this knowledge make in how we live?
- ❸ In what ways do we experience the joy of our salvation on a daily basis?

**Activity:** Take a few minutes to share testimonies regarding the hope that class members experience as a result of having found the joy of salvation in Christ.

### ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** Many find it difficult to know how to witness to others of the hope and joy of salvation. First, one needs to experience that hope and joy in a meaningful way. It may be helpful to practice sharing with one another before attempting to share with strangers. The Sabbath School class is an opportunity to practice sharing until one is comfortable knowing what to do and say.

**Activity:** Provide opportunity for class members to gain experience in witnessing for their faith by creating a role-playing situation in which members witness to one another as if to people in the community. Begin with experienced members, modeling witnessing activities; then encourage others to emulate their examples until they gain confidence.

# A Royal Priesthood



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *1 Pet. 2:1–3; Heb. 4:12; 1 Pet. 2:4–8; Isa. 28:16; Exod. 19:3–6; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9, 10.*

**Memory Text:** “You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (*1 Pet. 2:9, NKJV*).

Immersed as he is in Jewish culture, religion, and history, Peter refers to the Christians he is writing to as a “holy nation, God’s own people.” By doing so, he is taking covenant language that the Old Testament uses to refer to ancient Israel, and applying it here to the New Testament church.

And no wonder: Gentile believers in Jesus have been grafted into God’s covenant people. They are now partakers of the covenant promises, as well. “If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you” (*Rom. 11:17, 18, NIV*).

In the passages for this week, Peter points his readers to the sacred responsibility and high calling that they have as God’s covenant people, those who (using Paul’s language) have been grafted into the olive tree. And among those responsibilities is the same as what ancient Israel had—proclaiming the great truth of the salvation offered in the Lord.

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 15.

## Living as a Christian

First Peter 2:1 begins with “therefore,” meaning that what follows results from what came before. First Peter 1, we saw, was a *tour de force* in regard to what Christ has done for us and how we should respond to what He has done for us. In the next chapter, Peter picks up this theme and takes it further.

**Read 1 Peter 2:1–3.** What is Peter telling us about how we should live?

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Peter uses two separate images to show that Christians have a double duty. One is negative, in that some things are discarded; the other is a positive, in that we should seek to do something.

In his first image, Peter urges Christians to rid themselves of malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking (*1 Pet. 2:1, NKJV*). In doing this, Christians will conduct themselves differently from the way that many of those around them do. Because they have discarded malice, they will not desire to harm others but, instead, will seek their good. Because Christians have discarded insincerity, they will not act to deceive others but will be straightforward and honest. Christians will not envy those who have more than they do. They will be content with their lives and flourish where Providence has placed them. Nor will they make statements that deliberately damage another’s reputation.

The second image that Peter uses—that of a baby hungry for milk (*1 Pet. 2:2*)—provides the positive side of his instruction. Christian life is not merely a matter of giving up bad things. Such a life would be empty. No, it is a matter of seeking spiritual nourishment but with the same intensity that a hungry baby cries out for milk. He points readers to the source of that spiritual nourishment (*see also Heb. 4:12, Matt. 22:29, 2 Tim. 3:15–17*), the Word of God, the Bible. It is in the Word of God that we can grow spiritually and morally, because in it we have the fullest revelation possible, at least to us, of Jesus Christ. And in Jesus we have the greatest representation of the character and nature of the Holy God we are to love and serve.

**How are these two ideas related to each other: that is, why would seeking spiritual nourishment from the Word help us lay aside the bad actions and attitudes that Peter is warning us about?**

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## The Living Stone

**Read** 1 Peter 2:4–8 (see also Isa. 28:16; Ps. 118:22; Isa. 8:14, 15). What crucial truth is Peter referring to here? What is he saying to us about how we should act in response to Jesus?

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After telling his readers to seek spiritual nourishment, Peter immediately directs their attention to Jesus Christ, the Living Stone, most likely a reference to the Jerusalem temple. In 1 Peter 2:4–8, he cites three Old Testament passages that highlight the significance of cornerstones, which represent the role of Jesus in His church. Peter is not alone in linking these verses to Jesus. Jesus Himself uses Psalm 118:22 at the conclusion of one of His parables (*Matt. 21:42*). Peter does likewise in Acts 4:11 in his speech to the Jewish leadership. And Paul uses Isaiah 28:16 in Romans 9:33.

Peter's point is that even though Jesus was rejected and crucified, He was chosen by God to become the cornerstone of God's spiritual house. Christians, then, are living stones that are built into this spiritual house. By using the terminology of the cornerstone and building blocks, Peter is presenting an image of the church. The church is founded upon Jesus but is made up of those who follow Him.

Notice that becoming a Christian means that you become part of a Christian community, or local church. Just as a brick is to be built into a larger structure, so also Christians are not called to be followers of Jesus in isolation from others. A Christian who does not worship and work with other Christians to further the kingdom of God is a contradiction in terms. Christians are baptized into Christ, and by being baptized into Christ, they are baptized into His church.

Peter also talks about the function of the church. It is to form a "holy priesthood" (*1 Pet. 2:5*) that offers "spiritual sacrifices." In the Hebrew Bible, the priests mediate between God and His people. The words of Peter and others in the New Testament often use the language of temple and priesthood to present the church as the living temple of God and His people as its priests. He is pointing to the Old Testament system of worship in order to reveal truths about how Christians should live and act today.

**Read 1 Peter 2:5 again. What does it mean to "offer up spiritual sacrifices"? How do Christians, as part of a community at worship, do that?**

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## God's Covenant People

Peter is writing very much from an Old Testament perspective. And central to this perspective is the idea of covenant, a theme central to Jewish and Christian theology.

What is the covenant?

*Covenant* (Hebrew, *berit*) is a word that describes a treaty or formal agreement between two parties. It could be made between two individuals (for example, Laban and Jacob in Genesis 31:44) or between two kings (for example, Solomon and Hiram in 1 Kings 5:12, where *berit* is translated as “league” in the KJV and “treaty” in the NRSV). It could also be made between a king and his people, such as David and the elders of Israel (2 Sam. 5:3).

Prominent among these themes is the special covenant relationship that exists between God and His chosen people, the descendants of Abraham.

**Read** Genesis 17:1–4, Exodus 2:24, Exodus 24:3–8. What do these texts tell us about the covenant God made with Israel?

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The first book of the Bible, Genesis, recounts how God made a covenant with Abraham (*Gen. 15:9–21, 17:1–26*). God “remembered” this covenant when He rescued His people from oppression in Egypt (*Exod. 2:24*). God renewed it at the time of Moses, when He gave the Ten Commandments and other laws to the children of Israel (*Exod. 19:1–24:8; especially Exod. 24:3–8*).

But the covenant promises were not unconditional. “The Lord covenanted that if they were faithful in the observance of His requirements, He would bless them in all their increase and in all the work of their hands.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 574. Indeed, the prophets repeatedly warned Israel of the dangers of disobedience to God’s law, often using language reminiscent of the covenant. It has been argued that with the possible exception of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, many prophecies in the Bible are conditional. That’s how central the idea of obedience is in regard to the covenant promises. The covenantal prophecies of blessing were conditional on obedience to God’s law, and prophecies of doom applied only to the disobedient.

**What does it mean to you to be in a covenant relationship with God? What obligations does this covenant relationship place on you?**

## A Royal Priesthood

In the book of Exodus, chapter 19, the Lord said to Moses: “ ‘Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ ” (*Exod. 19:3–6, NKJV*).

Here’s the gospel message, revealed millennia before the Cross: God redeems His people, saving them from sin and the bondage of sin, and then He commands them to love and obey Him as a special covenant people before Him and before the world.

**Read** 1 Peter 2:5, 9, 10 and Exodus 19:6. What does Peter mean when he calls Christians a “royal priesthood” and “a holy nation” (*1 Pet. 2:9, NKJV*)? What does this language say to us as Seventh-day Adventist Christians about our obligations?

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*Spiritual house, chosen generation, royal priesthood, and God’s own people* are all terms of honor that in the Bible describe the special relationship that God had with the descendants of Abraham. Now, in the context of the New Testament, in the context of Jesus and the Cross, Peter is using the same covenant language and applying it to members of the church. The covenant promises made to Israel have now been widened to include not just the Jews who believe in Jesus but Gentile believers, as well. Yes, through Jesus, Gentiles, too, can claim to be children of Abraham. “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (*Gal. 3:29, NKJV*). Through Christ, anyone, regardless of birth, can become part of this “royal priesthood.”

***A holy nation? A royal priesthood?*** Applied to ourselves, what should terms like this mean in regard to the kind of lives we live, both as individuals and as a community? How can we better live up to this high calling?

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## Proclaiming the Praises

The parallels with the Old Testament church didn't end with just salvation and being called out and chosen by God. The question is, *Called out and chosen for what?* Peter quickly gives the answer.

Peter points out that this special relationship is for a purpose. Christians are to “proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9, *ESV*). This is what ancient Israel was to do. God called them to be witnesses of Him to the world. God's purpose was to bless the whole world through ancient Israel, His covenant people.

**Read** the following texts. What's the one point that they all have in common? *Deut. 4:6; 26:18, 19; Isa. 60:1–3; Zech. 8:23.*

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Ancient Israel, as the covenant people, had a mission to reach the world with the gospel, the salvation offered by the Lord. Christians have the same divine mission. They are called to share with others their experience and knowledge of God and what He has done for the world through Christ.

**Read 1 Peter 2:10.** Why is this text so central to the whole mission and purpose of Christians?

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The world is steeped in sin, in death, in impending doom. But Jesus gave His life to save everyone from this destruction. As with Israel of old, the terms of honor are also terms of responsibility. Christians have an extraordinarily high status: that of the people of God. But this brings the responsibility to invite others to share in that high status. As 1 Peter 2:10 states, Christians now form their own people. They once were not a people but have now received mercy to become a *holy* people (see *Hosea 1, 2*). In the Bible, the word *holy* usually has the meaning of set aside for the purpose of worship. Therefore, as a “holy” nation, Christians are to be separated from the world, a distinction seen in the kind of lives that they live. They are also to be like a fire on a cold night, which will draw others to its warmth. Christians are tasked with the responsibility of sharing with others the glorious salvation of which they have partaken.

**Further Thought:** “The church is very precious in God’s sight. He values it, not for its external advantages, but for the sincere piety which distinguishes it from the world. He estimates it according to the growth of the members in the knowledge of Christ, according to their progress in spiritual experience.

“Christ hungers to receive from His vineyard the fruit of holiness and unselfishness. He looks for the principles of love and goodness. Not all the beauty of art can bear comparison with the beauty of temper and character to be revealed in those who are Christ’s representatives. It is the atmosphere of grace which surrounds the soul of the believer, the Holy Spirit working upon mind and heart, that makes him a savor of life unto life, and enables God to bless his work.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 298.

### Discussion Questions:

① What is it like to be called out of darkness into “His marvelous light” (*NKJV*)? What does that mean? If you were to explain this idea to someone who didn’t believe in Jesus, what would you say? What is the darkness? What is the light? And what is the difference between the two in the context of what Peter is talking about?

② “‘Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?’” (*Deut. 4:5–8, NKJV*). In what ways do these words apply to us as Seventh-day Adventists and what we have been called by God to do because of all that we have been given?

③ Read 1 Peter 2:3. What does Peter mean when he says, “If indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious” (*NKJV*)? How have you “tasted” of His grace?

④ Look around at your local church. What is it about your church, if anything, that makes it and you who are members of it appealing to those who know nothing about Seventh-day Adventists or about what we believe?

## The Canceled Funeral—Part 3

I was still sleeping when a knock awakened me at dawn. “Pastor, come. She’s dead again!” One-Ojo’s mother cried. In disbelief, I opened the door and asked what had happened.

“While we slept, her father came home. Maybe he put the herbs on her,” she said. Someone wanted One-Ojo to die. Was it the father? Perhaps it was her mother, too. Should I go back and pray again? Would God be honored? One-Ojo’s mother knelt before me and begged me to come and pray for her daughter. I went.

Once more I prayed for the girl, and she awoke again. This time I told her mother to take One-Ojo away from the village. Her mother agreed, and One-Ojo’s brother took her to relatives in another village.

One-Ojo returned home several months later, strong and healthy. She continued her Bible studies and was baptized along with nine other new believers. On her baptismal day, One-Ojo took the name Blessing to signify her new life. Her presence in the village is a testimony to God’s power to save, even from death. Today 70 believers worship in a simple shelter near One-Ojo’s home in central Nigeria.

The story of One-Ojo spread throughout central Nigeria and opened doors to share God’s love with people in neighboring villages. Many people have come to know Jesus as their friend and Savior because of God’s power in the life of One-Ojo.

Your regular weekly mission offerings support the work of Global Mission pioneers around the world. Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering supports specific projects in the featured world division for each quarter. This quarter, the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will be going to the West-Central Africa Division (WAD), where it will be used to help build a youth multipurpose center at Babcock University in Nigeria and a new school—Central Africa Union Mission Academy—in Gabon. Thank you for your generous weekly gifts to mission and to the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering. You also may give to missions anytime on our secure Web site at [giving.adventistmission.org](http://giving.adventistmission.org).

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## The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Texts:** *1 Peter 2:4, 5, 9, 10*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Understand the high calling that he or she has in belonging to the covenant people of God.

**Feel:** Appreciate the special status to which God has called His covenant community—“a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession” (*1 Pet. 2:9, NIV*).

**Do:** Choose to fulfill the purposes for which God has called His people.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: A Royal Priesthood, a Holy Nation**

**A** What does it mean to be living stones in a spiritual house built upon a chosen and precious Cornerstone that is the living Stone?

**B** What is implied by the expression “a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (*1 Pet. 2:9, NIV*)?

**II. Feel: Identification With Christ’s Community**

**A** How does it feel to be hewn from the same quarry (*compare with Isa. 51:1*) and built into the same house as the Cornerstone?

**B** How do we behave once we realize that we are cut from the same quarry?

**III. Do: Declare His Praises.**

**A** How does Peter describe the purposes for which God has called His covenant people?

**B** In what ways are we fulfilling the purposes for which God has called us to Himself?

► **Summary:** Peter cites several Old Testament passages to remind his readers of their special status before God as members of God’s new covenant community in continuity with the Old Testament covenant community and built upon the same foundation—the Messiah.

## Learning Cycle

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### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *1 Peter 2:4, 5*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** We gain our spiritual identity from Christ, the living Stone, a chosen and precious Cornerstone. As living stones dug from the same quarry (*Isa. 51:1*), we are being built into a spiritual house for the purpose of offering up as a holy priesthood spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus. In mercy, God chose us for Himself to be a royal priesthood and a holy nation that we may declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. This statement of covenant is reminiscent of Exodus 19:5, 6, creating a continuity between the Old Testament covenant people of God and His New Testament covenant people.

**Just for Teachers:** It is very important to give attention in this section to Peter's quotations of, and allusions to, the Old Testament. Peter draws, respectively, on Isaiah 28:16; Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 8:14; and Exodus 19:5, 6. Study these passages and Peter's use of them to teach truths that his readers need to understand. How does Jesus use the stone passages to refer to Himself as the rejected Messiah? (*See Matt. 21:42, Mark 12:10, and Luke 20:17.*) How did Peter use the same idea in Acts 4:11? What use did Paul make of this idea in Ephesians 2:20? What allusions to Exodus 19:5, 6 seem to be made in Revelation 1:6, 5:10, 20:6?

**Opening Activity and Discussion:** Have the class read together 1 Peter 2:4–6 and Isaiah 51:1. Discuss the implied relation between the living Stone, who is the chosen and precious Cornerstone, and the living stones that are being built together into a spiritual house so that they might offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

### ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** Consider the transition that takes place between verses 1–3 and verses 4, 5 of 1 Peter 2. Verses 1–3 conclude the previous section, which speaks of a new birth “through the living and enduring word of God” (*1 Pet. 1:23, NIV*). Peter's readers are charged, “like newborn babies,” to “crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good” (*1 Pet. 2:2, 3, NIV*).



The metaphor changes, however, as Peter moves into the next section, in 1 Peter 2:4, 5. Suddenly Peter's readers are no longer babies but are living stones being built together into a spiritual house. They are also a holy priesthood offering up spiritual sacrifices to God. The latter metaphor continues in 1 Peter 2:9 as the believers are described as "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession" (*NIV*), building on the covenant language of the Old Testament.

## Bible Commentary

### I. Babies Craving Pure Spiritual Milk (*Review 1 Peter 2:1–3 with your class.*)

Peter charges those who have been born again through the Word of God (*1 Pet. 1:23*) and have tasted that the Lord is good (*1 Pet. 2:3*) to crave, as newborn babies, pure spiritual milk that will produce spiritual growth in them. A parallel with 2 Peter 3:18 may suggest that the pure spiritual milk is a knowledge of Jesus Christ as Lord and reception of His grace. (Peter's charge here to crave pure spiritual milk should not be viewed as being in conflict with Paul's criticism, in 1 Corinthians 3:1, 2 and Hebrews 5:12–14, of those who failed to move on to solid food as they grew. Peter is speaking in the context of the new birth.)

**Consider This:** What characteristics of spiritual maturity identified by Peter do I manifest in my own spiritual life? How can I make the study of God's Word a priority for myself?

### II. Living Stones Built Into a Spiritual House (*Review 1 Peter 2:4, 5 with your class.*)

Peter begins this section with the words, "As you come to him, the living Stone" (*1 Pet. 2:4, NIV*), referring to the Lord in verse 3. This forms the pretext for "you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house." One cannot be built into a spiritual house without coming to the Lord Jesus Christ. Just as He is the living Stone, we are to be "like living stones" (*1 Pet. 2:5, NIV*), as He is, as if hewn from the same quarry (*Isa. 51:1*). He is the chosen and precious Cornerstone (*1 Pet. 2:6*) of the spiritual house into which we are being built. The cornerstone is the stone from which the rest of the building is measured, plumbed, and squared. The believers are also "to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (*1 Pet. 2:5, NIV*). Regarding which spiritual sacrifices are acceptable to God, see Psalm 4:5; 51:17; 107:22; Romans 12:1; and Hebrews 13:15, 16.

**Consider This:** In what ways am I being built into a spiritual house for God? What spiritual sacrifices am I offering to God as one belonging to a holy priesthood?

### III. A People Chosen by and for God (*Review 1 Peter 2:9–12 with your class.*)

In Scripture, God chooses and calls; people respond. Those who respond positively are called the chosen or elect. Jesus said, “ ‘Many are called, but few are chosen’ ” (*Matt. 22:14, NKJV*). The fact that Peter calls his readers “a chosen people” (*1 Pet. 2:9, NIV*) suggests that they have responded to God’s call and have entered into covenant relationship with Him.

“A royal priesthood, a holy nation” refers to Exodus 19:5, 6, in which God tells Israel that if they keep His covenant, they will be for Him “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” This declaration does not mean that all will be priests, capable of serving in the presence of God in the temple. It means that His people will be expected, as “a holy priesthood” (*1 Pet. 2:5, NKJV*), to offer up spiritual sacrifices such as praise, joy, righteous deeds, and service to others (*see Heb. 13:15, 16*).

Thus, Peter declares, believers were chosen so that they “may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (*1 Pet. 2:9, NIV*). The possibility of believers rendering such service is because of God’s great mercy and grace in choosing them (*1 Pet. 2:10, NIV*). The gift of His merciful grace in the soul results in living godly lives before the world, to His glory (*1 Pet. 2:11, 12*).

#### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What clues might we have as to how much we do or do not crave pure spiritual milk?
- ❷ What evidence might be adduced that we are being built as living stones into a spiritual house?
- ❸ What spiritual sacrifices are we, as members of a holy priesthood, offering to God day by day? How are we glorifying Him who called us from darkness into light?

**Consider This:** Here Peter links the church with ancient Israel, God’s covenant people. In what ways do I sense a connection with historical Israel? With my own Adventist roots?

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** In *The Desire of Ages*, Ellen G. White provides some significant historical background to the image of the cornerstone. An actual occurrence in the history of the building of Solomon’s temple lay behind

Isaiah's prophecy. A large stone of unusual size and peculiar shape had been prepared for the cornerstone, but when it was brought to the building site, the workmen rejected it. Other stones were selected instead, but each failed to meet the demands of weather and pressure. Finally, the rejected stone was brought back. It met all of the demands placed upon it. It turned out to be an exact fit and was finally accepted as the cornerstone of the temple. "In prophetic vision, Isaiah was shown that this stone was a symbol of Christ."—Page 598.

### Thought Questions:

- ❶ In what ways do I demonstrate that I am a living stone being built up into a spiritual house?
- ❷ What does it mean for me to be part of a royal priesthood and a holy nation?
- ❸ How do I keep from stumbling on the living Stone, the precious Cornerstone?

**Activity:** Take time for class members to express praise to God for having called them out of darkness into His wonderful light.

## ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** It may be helpful for the class to become familiar with the tools and methods of a stonemason. Building with stone always begins at a base corner. It is critical for the first stone to be properly squared horizontally and vertically, as every other stone takes its alignment from the cornerstone. Strings are stretched vertically along the top edge of the cornerstone after it is set true with a level. A plumb bob at the corner provides a true vertical line. A tape measure determines the distance of the horizontal and vertical lines. Originally, large stones called ashlar were cut at the quarry and were set on one another without mortar. Their size and weight held them in place, sometimes with molten lead poured into adjoining notches on top to lock them into place once fitted.

**Activity:** Compare the metaphor for the church as a growing building in Ephesians 2:19–22 with the metaphor for the church as a growing body in Ephesians 4:12–16. Discuss how members need to adapt themselves to the respective structure for effective growth in each metaphor. How do living stones adapt themselves?

# Social Relationships



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *1 Pet. 2:13–23; 1 Pet. 3:1–7; 1 Cor. 7:12–16; Gal. 3:27, 28; Acts 5:27–32; Lev. 19:18.*

**Memory Text:** “Above all things have fervent love for one another, for ‘love will cover a multitude of sins’ ” (*1 Peter 4:8, NKJV*).

Peter's letter also tackles head-on some of the difficult social questions of his time. For instance, how should Christians live with an oppressive and corrupt government, such as what most of them experienced then: the pagan Roman Empire? What did Peter tell his readers, and what do his words mean to us today?

How should Christian slaves react when their masters treat them harshly and unjustly? Though modern employer-employee relationships are different from that of a first-century master-slave relationship, what Peter says will no doubt resonate with those who have to deal with unreasonable bosses. How fascinating that Peter points to Jesus and how He responded to bad treatment as the example of how Christians should conduct themselves when faced with the same (*1 Pet. 2:21–24*).

How should husbands and wives interact with each other, especially when they differ on a matter as fundamental as religious belief?

Finally, how should Christians relate to the social order when, in fact, the social and/or political order might be decidedly corrupt and contrary to Christian faith?

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 22.

## Church and State

Though written long ago, the Bible nevertheless touches on issues very relevant today, such as the relationship between Christians and their government.

In some cases, it's pretty obvious. Revelation 13 talks about a time when obeying the political powers would mean disobeying God. In such a case, our choice is clear. (*See Thursday's study.*)

**Read 1 Peter 2:13–17. What is the Word generally telling us here about how to relate to the government?**

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The evils of the Roman Empire were well known to those living within its borders. It had grown at the somewhat capricious will of ambitious men using ruthless military force. It met any resistance with violence. Systematic torture and death by crucifixion were just two of the horrors it inflicted upon those it punished. The Roman government was riddled by nepotism and corruption. The ruling elite exercised power with total arrogance and ruthlessness. Despite all this, Peter urges his readers to accept the authority of *every* human institution in the empire, from emperor to governor (*1 Pet. 2:13, 14, NIV*).

Peter argues that emperors and governors punish those who do wrong and praise those who do right (*1 Pet. 2:14*). In doing this, they have an important role in shaping society.

In fact, for all its faults, the Roman Empire provided stability. It brought freedom from war. It distributed a harsh justice but a justice based nevertheless on the rule of law. It built roads and established a monetary system to support its military needs. In doing so, Rome created an environment in which the population was able to grow and in many cases prosper. Seen in this light, Peter's comments about government make good sense. No government is perfect, and certainly not the one that Peter, and the church members to whom he wrote, lived under. So, what we can learn from him is that Christians need to seek to be good citizens, obeying the law of the land as much as they possibly can, even if the government they live under is anything but perfect.

**Why is it important for Christians to be as good citizens as possible, even in less-than-ideal political situations? What can you do to make your society better, even in a small way?**

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## Masters and Slaves

**Read** 1 Peter 2:18–23. How do we today understand the difficult content of these verses? What principle can we take from them for ourselves?

A careful reading of 1 Peter 2:18–23 reveals that rather than an endorsement of slavery, the texts give spiritual counsel on how to think about difficult circumstances that, at the time, could not be changed.

The word translated as “servant” or “slave” in 1 Peter 2:18, *oiketes*, is used specifically for domestic slaves. The more usual word for slave, *doulos*, is used in Ephesians 6:5, a passage that gives similar advice to slaves.

In the highly stratified Roman Empire, slaves were considered a legal possession under the absolute control of their master, who could treat them well or cruelly. Slaves came from a number of sources: defeated armies, children of slaves, or those “sold” to pay off their debts. Some slaves were given great responsibility. Some managed the large estates of their owners. Others managed their owners’ property and business interests, and some even educated their masters’ children.

A slave’s freedom could be purchased, in which case the slave was described as “redeemed.” Paul uses this language to describe what Jesus has done for us (*Eph. 1:7, Rom. 3:24, Col. 1:14*).

It is important to remember that a number of early Christians were slaves. As such, they found themselves caught in a system that they could not change. Those unfortunate enough to have harsh and unreasonable masters were in particularly difficult situations; even those with better masters could face trying circumstances. Peter’s instructions to all Christians who were slaves are consistent with other statements in the New Testament. They should submit and endure, just as Christ submitted and endured (*1 Pet. 2:18–20*). There is no credit for those suffering punishment for having done wrong. No, the real spirit of Christ is revealed when they are suffering unjustly. Like Jesus, at such times Christians are not to return abuse, nor to threaten, but entrust themselves to God, who will judge justly (*1 Pet. 2:23*).

**What practical applications can we make from what Peter wrote here? Does it mean, then, that we never stand up for our rights? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.**

## Wives and Husbands

**Read 1** Peter 3:1–7. What special circumstance is Peter addressing in this passage? How is what is said relevant to marriage in today's society?

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There is one significant clue in the text that enables the careful reader to work out the issue that Peter deals with in 1 Peter 3:1–7. In 1 Peter 3:1, Peter says he is talking about husbands who “obey not the word.” In other words, Peter is talking about what should happen when a wife who is a Christian is married to a husband who is not (even if the number who don’t believe are few).

A Christian wife would find many difficulties being married to a husband who does not share her faith. What should happen in these circumstances? Should she separate from her husband? Peter, like Paul elsewhere, does not suggest that Christian wives leave their nonbelieving husbands (*see 1 Cor. 7:12–16*). Instead, says Peter, wives with a husband who is not a believer must live exemplary lives.

The roles available to women in the first-century Roman Empire were determined largely by the individual society. Roman wives, for example, had more rights under the law regarding property and legal redress than would most of the women to whom Peter is writing. But in some first-century societies, women were excluded from involvement in politics, government, and leadership in most religions. Peter urges Christian women to take on a set of standards that would be admirable in the context in which they found themselves. He urges them to purity and reverence (*1 Pet. 3:2, NRSV*). He suggests that a Christian woman should be more interested in her inward beauty than in the adornment of fashionable hairstyles, jewelry, and expensive clothing (*1 Pet. 3:3–5*). A Christian woman will conduct herself in a manner that will recommend Christianity to the one who lives with her in a most intimate manner—her husband.

Peter’s words should not be taken by husbands as a license to mistreat their wives in any way. As he points out, husbands should show consideration to their wives (*1 Pet. 3:7*).

While Peter is addressing a specific issue—Christian wives married to nonbelievers—we can see a little of the ideal of Christian marriage: Christian partners should live in mutual support, living with transparent integrity as they worship God through their everyday activities.

## Social Relationships

**Read** Romans 13:1–7; Ephesians 5:22–33; 1 Corinthians 7:12–16; and Galatians 3:27, 28. How does what Paul says compare to what Peter says in 1 Peter 2:11–3:7?

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Paul addresses some of the issues raised in 1 Peter 2:11–3:7 in several places. What he says is remarkably consistent with what is found in 1 Peter. For example, like Peter, Paul urges his readers to be subject to the “governing authorities” (*Rom. 13:1, NKJV*). Rulers are appointed by God and are a terror to evil works, not good (*Rom. 13:3*). Thus, a Christian should, then, “render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor” (*Rom. 13:7, NKJV*).

Paul also emphasizes that women who are married to nonbelieving husbands should live exemplary lives, and as a result their husbands may join the church (*1 Cor. 7:12–16*). Paul’s model of the Christian marriage is also one of mutuality. Husbands should love their wives as Christ has loved the church (*Eph. 5:25*). Furthermore, he suggests that slaves should obey their earthly masters as they would obey Christ (*Eph. 6:5*).

Paul, then, was willing to work within legally mandated cultural boundaries. He understood what could be changed about his culture and what could not. Yet, he also saw something within Christianity that would end up transforming the way society thinks about people. Just as Jesus didn’t seek to bring about any kind of political revolution in order to change the social order, neither did Peter or Paul. Change could come, instead, by the leavening influence of godly people in their society.

**Read Galatians 3:27–29. Though clearly it is a theological statement, what powerful social implications might this text have regarding how Christians are to relate to one another because of what Jesus has done for them?**

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## Christianity and the Social Order

Despite knowing that human organizations and governments are flawed and sometimes sinful, and despite their bad experiences with governments and religious leaders, both Paul and Peter urged early Christians to submit to human authorities (*1 Pet. 2:13–17, Rom. 13:1–10*). Christians, they say, should pay taxes and contribute to compulsory labor obligations. As far as possible, Christians were to be model citizens.

**Read** Acts 5:27–32. What is the relationship between the obedience that Peter says to render to the authorities (*1 Pet. 2:13–17*) and what Peter and the other apostles actually did in this one incident?

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The early successes of the Christian church led to the arrest of Peter and John (*Acts 4:1–4*). They had been questioned by the rulers, elders, and scribes, and then let go with a stern warning that they should desist from preaching (*Acts 4:5–23*). Soon afterward they were arrested again and asked why they had not followed what the authorities told them to do (*Acts 5:28*). Peter replied, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (*Acts 5:29*).

**What** crucial truth must we take from these words?

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Peter was not being a hypocrite, saying one thing and doing another. When it became an issue of following God or following human beings, the choice was clear. Until then, Christians should be supportive and obedient to government, even if they also work to try to bring about positions of social change. When moral issues are at stake, Christians have been and still should be involved in legally promoting the kind of social changes that reflect the values and teachings of Jesus. How this should be done depends upon many factors, but being a loyal and faithful citizen doesn’t automatically mean that a Christian can’t or shouldn’t seek to help improve society.

**Read** Leviticus 19:18 and Matthew 22:39. How might the command to love our neighbor as ourselves include the need to work for change when that change could indeed make life better and fairer for your neighbor?

**Further Thought:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Impending Conflict,” pp. 582–592; “The Scriptures a Safeguard,” pp. 593–602; and “The Time of Trouble,” pp. 613–634, in *The Great Controversy*.

Ellen G. White advocated that Seventh-day Adventists be good citizens and obey the law of the land. She even told people *not* to openly and flagrantly disobey local Sunday laws; that is, though they must keep the seventh-day Sabbath holy, as God has commanded, they don’t need to deliberately violate laws that forbid Sunday labor. In one case in particular, however, she was clear that Adventists should not obey the law. If a slave had escaped his or her master, the law required that the slave be returned to that master. She railed against that law and told Adventists not to obey, despite the consequences: “When the laws of men conflict with the word and law of God, we are to obey the latter, whatever the consequences may be. The law of our land requiring us to deliver a slave to his master, we are not to obey, and we must abide the consequences of violating this law. The slave is not the property of any man. God is his rightful master, and man has no right to take God’s workmanship into his hands, and claim him as his own.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, pp. 201, 202.

## Discussion Questions:

- ❶ In class, discuss your answer to the question at the end of Monday’s study about this issue: Should Christians *never* stand up for their rights? As you do, consider this one question, as well: Just what are our rights?
- ❷ What are examples in which the impact of Christians on society has been a powerful force in changing that society for good? What lessons can we take from these accounts?
- ❸ What are examples in which Christians, instead of helping change the ills of society, acquiesced to those ills and even helped justify them? What lessons can we take from those stories, as well?
- ❹ First Peter 2:17 says, “Honor the emperor” (*NIV*). The emperor at that time was probably Nero, one of the more vile and corrupt of what already had been a corrupt and vile line of men. What message does this have for us today? How might what Peter wrote at the beginning of that text, “Honor all people” (*NKJV*), help us better to understand what he was saying?
- ❺ Read 1 Peter 2:21–25 in class. How is the gospel message encapsulated in these verses? What hope do they offer us? What do they call us to do? How well do we follow what we have been told to do here?

## A Changed Life: Part 1

Monsurat, a teen from Nigeria, was curious about her neighbor. He didn't go to the mosque on Friday, and he seemed so happy. She wondered what made him so different. She greeted him when she saw him on the street and watched as he worked around his home. Finally, she found the courage to ask him the question that had burned in her heart: "What religion do you follow?"

"I'm a Seventh-day Adventist," he replied. Monsurat had never heard of Adventists. He offered her a book, *Steps to Christ*, and Monsurat accepted it. When she was alone, she took out the book and began reading it. Although her parents couldn't read, Monsurat knew that they would be angry if they knew she had a Christian book; so, she kept it hidden.

Monsurat studied in a boarding school and enjoyed it very much. Soon, she forgot about the neighbor with the strange religion. But when Monsurat returned home for a long vacation, she remembered her neighbor and greeted him. One day he invited her to visit his church.

"I can't go," Monsurat said, genuinely sorry. "I have special classes on Saturday to prepare for my high school exams." She saw the disappointment in her neighbor's eyes. "Wait," she said. "I want to see what your church is like. Where is it?" The man told her where the church was located. That Saturday Monsurat prepared for her class but went to the neighbor's church instead. She was curious to see if the other people in the church were as kind as he was.

The church members welcomed her warmly. She enjoyed the service, even though it was very different from the religious services she was used to. Every week Monsurat dressed for class but went to church instead. Because church ended about the same time as her class, her parents never knew.

Monsurat received a Bible and began reading it. She learned to pray as Christians prayed and asked God to help her live a good life. She had been somewhat mischievous, but she was determined that her teachers and dean would see a different person when she returned to school.

Back at school, Monsurat discovered an Adventist church an hour away by bus. She got up early on Saturday morning to catch the bus. She spent most of the day with the church members and returned to school in the evening. Before the year ended, Monsurat gave her life to Christ and asked to be baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

*To be continued in next week's Inside Story.*

## *The Lesson in Brief*

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► **Key Text:** *1 Peter 2:13–17*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Recognize that God has established various levels of authority in this world and that Christians are obligated to submit to all established authority.

**Feel:** Appreciate God's system of order and authority and sense a responsibility to submit to it.

**Do:** Follow the counsel of Peter and the example of Jesus regarding how believers should relate to established authority.

► **Learning Outline:**

### **I. Know: God's System of Order**

**A** What does Peter tell us about our responsibility in view of God's established order? (*Compare with Paul's instruction in Rom. 13:1–7.*)

**B** What is God's will for His people in regard to doing good (*1 Pet. 2:15–17*)?

### **II. Feel: Following Christ's Example**

**A** In what way does Peter set forth Christ as our Model in respect to how we should regard trials and the suffering they may bring (*1 Pet. 2:21–24*)?

**B** What does Peter imply by calling Jesus the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls? (*Compare with 1 Pet. 5:2–4.*)

### **III. Do: Proper Submission to God's Order**

**A** In light of 1 Peter 2:21–23, how should we understand Peter's counsel for slaves or servants to submit to their masters?

**B** What is Peter's counsel for husbands and wives, and what model does he cite in 1 Peter 3:5, 6?

► **Summary:** Peter describes God's will in the ways in which a Christian relates to various levels of authority, doing what is right and good in order to bring glory to God. He cites the example of Jesus, as well as the example of holy women of old, as patterns for New Testament Christians.

## Learning Cycle

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### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *1 Peter 2:13–15*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** If we follow the example of Jesus, as well as that of other godly examples from Scripture, we will find that God has established various levels of authority to which we are asked to submit as appropriate, according to His will (*1 Pet. 2:15*) and “for the Lord’s sake” (*1 Pet. 2:13*). (Paul gives very similar instruction in Romans 13, Ephesians 5:21–6:9, and Colossians 3:18–4:1.) The believer is expected to model good conduct to the glory of God by submitting to the established authorities, whether in civil government, in work relationships, or in the home and church.

**Just for Teachers:** As the lesson topic is explored, it would be helpful to study the parallels noted above in Paul’s writings for the purpose of seeing the big canonical picture. Romans 13:2 speaks very severely about those who reject the authority that God has established and how they will be judged (*compare with 2 Pet. 2:9, 10; Jude 6, 8*). The class should discuss the ramifications of these counsels for all human relationships.

**Opening Activity and Discussion:** Have the class read together 1 Peter 2:13–15 and Romans 13:1–5. Discuss the parallels between these two passages and how they support and enhance each other. In what various ways do they introduce God and His will into the picture? Do these passages give blanket authority to individuals, or is the authority vested in the offices or positions they hold? Explain. To what higher authority are these individuals, in turn, expected to be in submission?

### ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** Compare 1 Peter 2:16 with Galatians 5:13. What point are these two passages making? What danger is there in thinking we are free from all restraint or law? See 2 Peter 2:18–20. Discuss with the class Paul’s argument in Romans 6:15–22 about the benefits of being a slave to righteousness as opposed to being a slave to sin. How does this line of reasoning play into the larger discussion in 1 Peter 2 about submitting to authority? Why does Peter end verse 16, which begins with “Live as free people” (*NIV*), by saying, “Live as God’s slaves”? How should we understand this antinomy (an apparent contradiction between two equally valid principles that seem to say dissimilar things)?

## Bible Commentary

### I. Employee-Employer Relationships (*Review 1 Peter 2:18–20 with your class.*)

After discussing submission to authority, in general, especially civil authority, Peter turns to the issue of servant-master relationships, which speaks to modern employer-employee relationships. The term *doulos* includes a variety of servant, or slave, functions but most commonly refers to an individual working to pay off a debt. In any case, the *doulos* owed loyalty, respect, and faithful service to the master for whom he or she worked. What the master was due was based not on how well the servant was treated but on the authority of the master and on the responsibility of the servant to submit to that authority. Submitting, despite harsh treatment, was considered commendable because it showed a consciousness of God as the ultimate Master or Authority (*compare with Eph. 6:5–9*).

**Consider This:** What effect will my relationship with my employer have on those who are observing my daily conduct as a believer?

### II. The Example of Christ (*Review 1 Peter 2:21–25 with your class.*)

Peter insists that those of his readers who have endured suffering for doing good have been called to follow in the example of Christ, who suffered for them while doing good. “‘He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth’” (*1 Pet. 2:22, NIV*). Peter here quotes from Isaiah 53:9 as evidence that Christ was doing good, adding, “When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly” (*1 Pet. 2:23, NIV*). Then Peter borrows again from the Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 53, concluding in verse 24 of his epistle, “‘He himself bore our sins’ in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; ‘by his wounds you have been healed’ ” (*NIV*).

The substitutionary sacrifice that Jesus made for us places on us an obligation to behave with humility as He did and with readiness to suffer for doing what is right. Peter’s rationale, in *1 Peter 2:25*, explains that although in the past we were like sheep going astray, that we now have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls, and we have an obligation to follow in His steps, just as sheep do when they have meaningful relationships with the shepherd.

**Consider This:** Jesus endured suffering by maintaining His focus on the goal (*Heb. 12:2*). What goal can help us to successfully endure as He endured?

### III. Spousal Relationships (Review together 1 Peter 3:1–7.)

Continuing the theme of submission to established authority, Peter now addresses wives, enjoining them to be submissive to their husbands. This counsel is similar to that given by Paul in Ephesians 5:22–33 and in Colossians 3:18, 19. Only here, Peter explicitly includes wives with unbelieving husbands, which broadens the application even further. He argues that husbands who are unbelievers may be won over to Christ, without a word, by their wives' good behavior and the purity and reverence of their lives (*1 Pet. 3:1, 2*).

Peter goes on to discuss the beauty of Christian character—"a gentle and quiet spirit" (*1 Pet. 3:3, 4, NIV*)—that wives should demonstrate, as opposed to external display of decorative hair, clothing, and jewelry. Then he cites the example of "holy women of the past" (*1 Pet. 3:5, NIV*), such as Sarah, who were deferential to their husbands and obeyed them, showing respect by doing what was right (*1 Pet. 3:6*). Finally, Peter addresses husbands who, "in the same way," are to be considerate of their wives, treating them "[with great gentleness and tact, and with an intelligent regard for the marriage relationship], as with someone physically weaker, since she is a woman. Show her honor and respect as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered or ineffective" (*1 Pet. 3:7, AMP*).

**Consider This:** The expression "weaker vessel" (*ESV, KJV*), in verse 7 of some translations, does not refer to physical or emotional weakness. It refers to finely made dishware. Very likely it is a reference to how men should treat women, behaving toward them as they would a valuable piece of china, which should be handled with great care and regard lest it be broken needlessly. The expression is a positive assessment of the value of the wife and the considerate and gentle manner in which she should be treated. How do we assess the value of women in our lives?

#### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ How should we show honor for civil authorities who may not be behaving as they ought in harmony with the principles of doing good and punishing wrongdoing?
- ❷ Why is it not legitimate to use 1 Peter 2:18–20 to attempt to justify slavery?
- ❸ What specifics does Peter address in his discussion of husband-wife relationships?

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** When Peter says in 1 Peter 2:17, "Show proper respect to everyone" (*NIV*), he identifies three specific groups other than the servants and masters and husbands and wives whom he subsequently addresses

directly. These are the family (of believers), the emperor, and God. God is at the very highest level and is to be feared or shown due respect and reverence, which would include worship. The emperor, or king (*KJV*), is representative of the highest level of authority on earth, and he is to be honored above other civil authorities. The family of believers is all those who are on an equal ground with ourselves, for in Christ “there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one” (*Gal. 3:28, NIV*). We are to love this church family with the self-sacrificing love (*agapē*) of God and of Christ. How does this instruction encapsulate Peter’s intent?

### Thought Questions:

- ❶ Why is it important for the believing employee to submit with all due respect to the boss or employer—even one who is harsh and unjust, as well as to the one who is good and considerate?
- ❷ How do I behave if I sense that I have been called to follow in the footsteps of Jesus in suffering for doing what is right?
- ❸ How do I focus on having a beautiful character rather than on external adornment? How did the holy women of the past make themselves beautiful, according to Peter?

**Activity:** Have the class discuss the specifics of Christ’s suffering for the sake of righteousness and the ways in which we can follow in His footsteps.

## ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** In Paul’s discussion of submission to one another (*Eph. 5:21–6:9*), all four examples of how one submits involve relationships in which submission is one way and nonreciprocal: wives to husbands, the church to Christ, children to parents, and servants or slaves to masters. Husbands are never commanded to submit to wives, nor Christ to the church, nor parents to children, nor masters to servants. Authority and submission work only in one direction. This principle pervades Scripture, and it reaches into heaven (*1 Cor. 11:3*) and, in some ways, into eternity (*1 Cor. 15:28*).

**Activity:** Have the class create a chart representing relationships from Scripture that involve authority and submission, including relationships within humanity, between earth and heaven, and within the heavenly family. Note biblical passages that identify these relationships. Observe how they fit into the pattern of relationships as identified by Peter in this week’s lesson.



# Living *for* God



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *1 Pet. 3:8–12; Gal. 2:20; 1 Pet. 4:1, 2; Rom. 6:1–11; 2 Sam. 11:4; 1 Pet. 4:3–11.*

**Memory Text:** “For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil” (*1 Peter 3:12, NKJV*).

The Bible writers knew the reality of human sinfulness. How could they not? The world reeks of it. Besides, they knew their own sinfulness, as well (*see 1 Tim. 1:15*). They knew just how serious it was, too; after all, look at what it took—the cross of Jesus Christ—to solve the problem of sin. That’s how deep and pervasive the reality of sin really is.

But the Bible writers also were greatly aware of the power of Christ to change our lives and make us new people in Him.

This week, Peter continues on this same track: the kind of new life that Christians will have in Christ after they have given themselves to Him and have been baptized. In fact, the change will be so great that others will notice it. Peter doesn’t say that this change will always be easy; indeed, he talks about the need to suffer in the flesh (*1 Pet. 4:1*) in order to have the victory that we are promised.

Peter continues a theme that pervades the Bible, the reality of love in the life of a believer in Jesus. “Love,” he writes, “will cover a multitude of sins” (*1 Pet. 4:8, NKJV*). When we love, when we forgive, we are reflecting what Jesus has done and still does for us.

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 29.

## Being of “One Mind”

**Read** 1 Peter 3:8–12. What point is Peter making here about how Christians should live? What does he repeat that he already wrote about in 1 Peter 2:20, 21?

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Peter starts out telling them all to be of “one mind” (*homophrones*). He’s not talking about uniformity, in the sense of everyone having to think, do, and believe *exactly* the same way. The best example of this idea is found in 1 Corinthians 12:1–26. In these verses, Paul points out that the body is made up of parts. There are hands and eyes, but still together each part makes up the whole body. In the same way, the church is made up of individuals with different spiritual gifts. But all believers are joined together with the same purpose and spirit. They work together to form a united community.

Of course, such unity is not always so easy to achieve. The history of the Christian church sadly has shown this fact to be true all too often. So Peter warns believers against not agreeing with one another. Then he tells his readers how they can show this Christian ideal of being united.

For example, Christians should act with sympathy (1 Pet. 3:8). Sympathy means that when one Christian suffers, then others will suffer with him or her; when another Christian rejoices, other Christians will rejoice with him or her (*compare 1 Cor. 12:26*). Sympathy enables us to see the perspective of others, an important step along the way to unity. Peter then says we should “love one another” (1 Pet. 3:8, *NIV*). Jesus Himself said that the way you can recognize His true disciples is that they love one another (*John 13:35*). Furthermore, Peter says that Christians will have a tender heart (1 Pet. 3:8). They will have compassion for one another’s difficulties and failings.

“Crucify self; esteem others better than yourselves. Thus you will be brought into oneness with Christ. Before the heavenly universe, and before the church and the world, you will bear unmistakable evidence that you are God’s sons and daughters. God will be glorified in the example that you set.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 188.

**How often do we do what Peter says here, especially the part about “not returning evil for evil” (1 Pet. 3:9, *NKJV*)? What kind of death to self must we experience in order to follow these words? How can we have that kind of death? (See Gal. 2:20.)**

## To Suffer in the Flesh

Yes, Jesus died for our sins, and our hope of salvation is found only in Him, in His righteousness, which covers us and causes us to be accounted righteous in the eyes of God. Because of Jesus, you are “accepted before God just as if you had not sinned.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 62.

But God’s grace doesn’t end just with a pronouncement, a declaration that our sins are forgiven. God gives the power to overcome our sins, as well.

**Read** 1 Peter 3:18, 21 and 1 Peter 4:1, 2, as well as Romans 6:1–11. What is the link between suffering and victory over sin?

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There is a small Greek word used in 1 Peter 3:18 that emphasizes the comprehensive nature of Jesus’ sacrifice. It is the word *hapax*, which means “once for all.” Peter uses *hapax* to emphasize the comprehensive nature of the suffering of Jesus and His death for us.

The phrase “forasmuch then” in 1 Peter 4:1 links 1 Peter 4:1, 2 with what has just been said in 1 Peter 3:18–22. In these earlier verses, Peter points out that Christ suffered for our sins in order that He might bring us to God (1 Pet. 3:18) and that “baptism doth also now save us” (1 Pet. 3:21).

Baptism, then, is perhaps the best context against which to understand Peter’s words, “for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin” (1 Pet. 4:1). By baptism, the Christian participates in the suffering and death and resurrection of Jesus; the Christian has made a choice to “live for the rest of [his or her] earthly life no longer by human desires but by the will of God” (1 Pet. 4:2, *NRSV*). This can be accomplished only by the daily surrender of self to the Lord and the crucifying of “the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal. 5:24, *NKJV*).

In Romans 6:1–11, Paul says that at baptism Christians are united with Jesus in His death and resurrection. At baptism, we have died to sin. We need now to make that death to sin real in our lives. Paul’s words, “reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:11), give the secret of the Christian’s life.

**When was the last time you found yourself “suffering in the flesh” in order to fight against sin? What does your answer say to you about your Christian life?**

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## Born Again

In Christ, we have a new life, a new beginning. We are born again. If this means anything, especially for those who accepted Christ after childhood, it must mean that they will live differently from the way they did before. Who hasn't heard some incredible stories of those who, having been in the world, experienced a radical transformation because of Jesus and His saving grace?

Indeed, after talking about the death to self and the new life we have in Jesus (having been baptized into His death and resurrection), Peter then talks about the kind of changes one will experience.

**Read 1 Peter 4:3–6. What changes will happen in a person's life, and how do others respond to those changes?**

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The terms Peter used that relate to alcohol abuse are *excess of wine* (KJV), *drunkenness* (NRSV), *revellings*, *banquetings* (KJV), and *carousing* (NRSV). To use modern phraseology, one's partying days are over. In fact, according to Peter, the change that a Christian experiences should be great enough so that those who knew the Christian in his or her past life will "think it strange" that he or she no longer takes part in those same dissipations (1 Pet. 4:4, NKJV). Thus, we can see here a chance to witness to unbelievers without having to preach. A godly Christian life can be more of a witness than all the sermons in the world.

**What does Peter say in these texts about judgment?**

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Here, as elsewhere in the Bible (John 5:29, 2 Cor. 5:10, Heb. 9:27), Peter makes it clear that one day there will be a judgment for the deeds done "in the flesh" (1 Pet. 4:2). When Peter talks about the gospel being "preached also to those who are dead" (1 Pet. 4:6, NKJV), he is saying that even in the past, people who are now dead had, when they were alive, an opportunity to know the saving grace of God. Thus, God can justly judge them, as well.

**As a believer in Jesus, how differently do you live now from the way you did when you didn't believe in Him? What difference has Jesus made in your life?**

## Sins of the Flesh

In listing the wrong things that people had done in the past and that they stopped doing after becoming believers in Jesus, Peter also lists what could be called “sexual sins.”

**Read** 1 Peter 4:3 again. What else does Peter list there?

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Two words have a distinctive sexual connotation: *lewdness* (*aselgia*, which means “sensuality”) and *lusts* (*epithumia*, which means “lust” or “desire”).

Yet, it is all too easy for Christians to give the wrong impression about sexuality. The Bible is not against sex. On the contrary, God created sex, and He gave sexuality to humankind to be a great blessing. Sexuality was there in Eden, at the beginning. “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed” (*Gen. 2:24, 25*). It was to be one of the key ingredients that would unite a husband and wife in a lifelong commitment that forms the best background against which to raise children. And this closeness and intimacy would be a reflection of what God seeks with His people, as well (*see Jeremiah 3, Ezekiel 16, Hosea 1–3*).

In its correct place, between a man and a woman in marriage, sexuality is a profound blessing; in the wrong place, in the wrong context, it can be one of the greatest destructive forces in the world. The here-and-now devastating *consequences* of these sins are beyond human calculation. Who among us doesn’t know about lives ruined through the abuse of this wonderful gift?

**What** do the following texts have in common? *2 Sam. 11:4, 1 Cor. 5:1, Gen. 19:5, 1 Cor. 10:8.*

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Of course, one doesn’t need the Bible to know stories of the pain and suffering that these sins have caused.

Yet, we must be careful, too. Certainly, sins of this nature can have powerfully negative effects on people, and society tends to frown upon them. But sin is sin, and Christ’s death covers sexual sins, as well. As a Christian, you should be careful, especially in this sensitive area, to make sure that you “‘first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye’ ” (*Luke 6:42, NIV*).

## Love Covers All

Even in the time of Peter, Christians lived with the expectation of the soon return of Jesus and the end of this present world. We know this because in 1 Peter 4:7 he writes: “But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers” (*NKJV*). In other words, be ready for the end. In one very real sense, too, the “end,” as far as each one of us is concerned, is never more than a moment after we die. We close our eyes in death, and—whether thousands of years pass or just a few days—the next thing we know is the second coming of Jesus and the end of this world.

**According** to Peter, because the “end of all things” is at hand, how should Christians live? See 1 Pet. 4:7–11.

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Besides being serious and watchful in prayer, Christians are to “maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Pet. 4:8, *NRSV*).

What does that mean? How does love cover sin? A key is found in the text Peter is quoting, Proverbs 10:12, which reads: “Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins” (*NKJV*). When we love one another, we more readily and easily forgive those who hurt us, who offend us. Christ’s love leads Him to forgive us; our love should lead us to forgive others. Where love abounds, small offenses, and even some large ones, more readily are overlooked and forgotten.

Peter was certainly expressing the same idea as Jesus and Paul, who say that the whole law is summed up in the obligation to love God with our whole hearts and love our neighbors as ourselves (*Matt. 22:34–39, Rom. 13:8–10*).

Peter also urges Christians to be hospitable. The Second Coming may be near, but Christians should not withdraw from social relationships because of it. Finally, when Christians speak, they must do so as those who are speaking the words of God. In other words, the seriousness of the time calls for serious communication about spiritual truths.

**“Love will cover a multitude of sins.” Who has sinned against you? How can you reveal the love needed in order to “cover” that sin? Why is it to your own advantage to do so?**

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**Further Thought:** “The love that suffers long and is kind will not magnify an indiscretion into an unpardonable offense, neither will it make capital of others’ misdoings. The Scriptures plainly teach that the erring are to be treated with forbearance and consideration. If the right course is followed, the apparently obdurate heart may be won to Christ. The love of Jesus covers a multitude of sins. His grace never leads to the exposing of another’s wrongs, unless it is a positive necessity.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 267. Think, for instance, of how Jesus handled the woman caught in adultery (*John 8:1–11*). We usually look at this as a story of Christ’s grace to a fallen woman, and that’s true. But there’s a deeper element, as well. In confronting the religious leaders who brought the woman to Him, why did Jesus write down the “guilty secrets of their own lives” (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 461) in the dirt, where the words could instantly be obliterated? Why didn’t He openly accuse them, declaring before everyone what He knew about their own sins, which might have been just as bad as or even worse than that woman’s? Instead, Jesus showed them that He knew their hypocrisy and evil, and yet was not going to expose it to others. Perhaps this was Jesus’ own way of reaching out to these men, showing them He knew their purposes and thus giving them an opportunity to be saved. What a powerful lesson for us when we need to confront those who have sinned.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Dwell more on the question of unity as opposed to uniformity. Are there some areas in which we need to be in complete unity of thought in order to function as a church? If so, what are they, and how can we find this needed uniformity? In contrast, what are areas in which a diversity of opinion is not harmful but, in fact, could be helpful?
- ❷ What has been your own experience with the concept of the need to “suffer in the flesh” in order to cease from sin? What does that mean? Does God’s power in our lives to change us mean automatically that we don’t suffer in the flesh in order to have victory? If not, why not?
- ❸ Look around at the devastation that alcohol has produced in so many lives. What can we do as a church to help others see the danger of this drug? What can we do to keep our young people aware of what a mistake it would be even to experiment with a substance that can do them such terrible harm?

## A Changed Life: Part 2

Monsurat didn't tell her friends where she went on Saturdays, but they noticed changes in her. She had become more responsible and wasn't the first one to suggest mischief. When vacation came, Monsurat attended her neighbor's church. Her parents noticed she was going out on Saturdays and asked where she was going, but Monsurat evaded answering.

When the family went to the mosque to pray, Monsurat went as well. Instead of reciting the prayers she had learned long ago, she prayed in her heart to Jesus. Her mother noticed that she wasn't reciting the prayers and asked why. Monsurat decided that she should no longer hide her faith from her parents. She would be honest and tell them she had become a Christian.

Her parents became angry. They forbade her to speak to her Christian neighbor or attend church. They urged her friends and teachers to do what they could to force her to renounce her Christian faith. But, as much as Monsurat wanted to obey her parents, she refused to give up her Jesus.

Finally, Monsurat's father told her that she was no longer his daughter. She had to leave the house, and he wouldn't pay for the two remaining years of her high school education.

Monsurat was terrified of being on her own. But she prayed, and God's peace flooded over her. She claimed Psalm 27:10 as her hope: "Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me" (NIV). Church members helped Monsurat pay her school fees, and a friend who lived near her school let her live with her.

Monsurat often tried talking to her parents, but they refused to listen. She felt very lonely. Church members visited Monsurat's family, pleading with her parents to let their daughter return home. Finally, her parents allowed Monsurat to return.

But things didn't go well, and Monsurat realized she could not continue living at home. She asked a church elder what to do, and he suggested that she apply to study at the Seventh-day Adventist university in Nigeria. There she could live and study in peace. The church would sponsor her and pay her fees.

Monsurat enrolled at Babcock University to study nursing. Her parents are now proud of what she has achieved, and they even visited her a few times while she was at Babcock. Monsurat prays that one day her family will accept Jesus and says that she hopes her story will help other young people to stand firm in their faith.

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*MONSURAT studied nursing at Babcock University in Nigeria.*



## *The Lesson in Brief*

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► **Key Texts:** *1 Peter 3:8, 9; 4:7, 8*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Understand that living a life of love, harmony, humility, and compassion is the first priority of every believer.

**Feel:** Sense a responsibility to emulate the example of Jesus in living for others.

**Do:** Choose to accept Christ's calling to live out the principles of God's government—in which love is the primary and fundamental principle.

► **Learning Outline:**

### **I. Know: Living and Loving**

**A** What five imperatives does Peter “finally” enjoin upon his readers in 1 Peter 3:8?

**B** What three imperatives does Peter add in 1 Peter 4:7, 8, in view of the fact that the end of all things is at hand? Which one is “above all”?

### **II. Feel: Experiencing Christ's Compassion**

**A** What is necessary in order to experience sympathy, love, and compassion for others (*1 Pet. 3:8*)?

**B** What does it mean to “love each other deeply” (*1 Pet. 4:8, NIV*)?

### **III. Do: Accepting God's Calling**

**A** To what does Peter say (*in 1 Pet. 3:9*) we are called, so that we may inherit a blessing?

**B** In what context does Peter enjoin his readers to be clear minded and self-controlled so that they can pray (*1 Pet. 4:7*)?

► **Summary:** Peter appeals to his readers, in the context of the imminence of the judgment, to live lives that measure up to the life of Christ, exemplifying love, sympathy, humility, harmony, and compassion, among other good character traits that he commends to his readers. He views modeling this standard as God's calling in the life of a Christian, which results in God's blessing.

## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *1 Peter 4:1, 2*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Jesus is our Example in all things. The sufferings that He experienced enabled Him to overcome sin (*compare with Heb. 2:10; 5:8, 9*). Our suffering in His behalf will enable us to overcome, as well, if we learn and grow from our experiences. Peter states, “Whoever suffers in the body is done with sin” (*1 Pet. 4:1, NIV*). This growth experience is clearly in the context of doing that which is right (*1 Pet. 2:20, 21; 3:14, 17*). One does not suffer for doing that which is right while at the same time cherishing sinful habits. Only the person who is committed to putting away sin from the life is willing to suffer for doing that which is right. This reminder should serve as encouragement to those of Peter’s readers who are experiencing suffering for being faithful to their convictions.

**Just for Teachers:** Considerable debate has waged over the context of suffering to which Peter refers. Was it merely verbal abuse, slander, and malicious talk? Or did it involve physical abuse, as well? Peter’s point is not focused on the type of persecution but on the reason for the persecution. Karen Jobes notes that for Peter, “the destiny of Christ is the destiny of the Christian.” Regarding the reason for the persecution, she observes, “The apostle carefully delimits the type of suffering in view to that caused by persecution for nothing other than bearing the name of Christ (4:14-16).”—*1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), p. 45.

**Opening Activity and Discussion:** Have the class read 1 Peter 3:13–17 together. Discuss what Peter expects from his readers in terms of their conduct as witnesses to unbelievers. The key for them was to “sanctify Christ as Lord” (*1 Pet. 3:15, NASB*) in their hearts and to keep “a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander” (*1 Pet. 3:16, NIV*).

### ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** In chapter 3, verses 8 and 9, of his first letter, Peter concludes his discussion about how to live in the world, which begins in chapter 2, verse 11. Closing with the expression *de telos* (which means “finally,” “in conclusion,” or “in summary”), he

appeals to all to live lives of harmony, sympathy, love, compassion, and humility. Believers are not to return evil for evil or insult for insult. Instead, they are to return a blessing, for they were called to this way of life so that they might inherit a blessing. All that follows, down to the “Amen” at the end of 1 Peter 4:11, is in this context.

## Bible Commentary

### I. Inheriting a Blessing (*Review 1 Peter 3:8–12 with your class.*)

After calling his readers to live Christlike lives, Peter quotes from Psalm 34:12–16 to explain how one can inherit a blessing, even in the face of opposition from those who are evil. The secret is twofold: First, one must turn from speaking and doing evil and, instead, do good, pursuing peace (*1 Pet. 3:10, 11*). Second, one must trust the Lord to hear the prayers of the righteous and to defend them against those who do evil (*1 Pet. 3:12*). David, who wrote Psalm 34 while fleeing from those who wanted to destroy him, learned how to trust God and to return good for evil. Read the entire psalm and reminisce on David’s good treatment of his enemy, King Saul, and the blessing that David inherited.

**Consider This:** What am I doing in my relationships that will lead to inheriting a blessing?

### II. Baptism: Death in the Body, Life in the Spirit (*Review together 1 Peter 3:18–22.*)

This difficult passage requires that we not lose sight of the main point because of the tangential issues that Peter introduces. Christ died for our sins in order to bring us to God; and baptism represents our death to sin in order to bring us to new life in the Spirit. Through baptism we participate symbolically in Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection to new life (*compare with Rom. 6:3, 4*). Baptism saves us, not by an external process of washing dirt from the body but by the resurrection of Christ and our commitment to having a clear conscience in the sight of God (*1 Pet. 3:21, 22*).

The difficult part of the passage, in verses 19 and 20, introduces the story of the great Flood in order to set up the idea of Noah’s ark as a symbol for baptism (*1 Pet. 3:21*). The “spirits in prison” (*NKJV*) refer to the antediluvians, “who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built” (*1 Pet. 3:20, NIV*). Christ preached the gospel in the Spirit “to those who are dead” through the preaching of Noah so that there would be a basis for their judgment (*1 Pet. 4:6, NKJV*). They are referred to as spirits in prison because they are metaphorically held or reserved for judgment at the last day (*compare with 2 Pet. 2:4, 9; Jude 6; and Rev. 20:1–3*).

**Consider This:** How have I responded to the preaching of Christ, in the Spirit, through His agents? What can I do to cooperate with God to ensure that my response results in salvation, as opposed to my being reserved for judgment?

### III. Living in View of the Judgment (*Review 1 Peter 4:7–11 with your class.*)

Peter now closes his section on how to live as aliens and strangers in the world. He calls his readers to eschatological awareness—a consciousness of the imminence of judgment: “The end of all things is near” (*1 Pet. 4:7, NIV*). In view of this judgment, Peter appeals for maintaining the mental clarity needed for effective prayer and, above all, for deep love for one another. He draws from Proverbs 10:12, stating that love covers a multitude of sins (*compare with James 5:20*), meaning that it “takes no account of the evil done to it [it pays no attention to a suffered wrong]” (*1 Cor. 13:5, AMPC*). God treats the believer with no less love. Our responsibility, therefore, is to “serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms” (*1 Pet. 4:10, NIV*). This service is to be rendered “with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ” (*1 Pet. 4:11, NIV*).

**Consider This:** What evidences in my life indicate that I am living with a sense of the imminence of judgment? How would I live if I believed each day were my last?

#### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What blessings have we received because we have done that which is right and trusted God with the results?
- ❷ According to 1 Peter 3:12 and 4:7, prayer plays what role in the appeal for believers to live with an awareness of the imminence of judgment?

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Christians were often misunderstood by their neighbors and in their communities. Their meetings often were considered to be secret rites because they met in private homes and worshiped in unusual ways. Because they ate the “body” and drank the “blood” of the One they worshiped in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, they were accused of cannibalism. Because they called one another “brother” and “sister,” celebrated “love feasts,” and kissed each other like family members with a “kiss of love” (*1 Pet. 5:14, NKJV*), they also were accused of practicing incest and various other immoral vices. In view of these

mischaracterizations, Peter wants believers to represent Christianity rightly before their neighbors so that there will be no misunderstandings or basis for false accusations. Still, Christ was put to death, although He was innocent of any evil doing; believers should not expect to be treated any better.

#### Thought Questions:

- ❶ How can I put to shame false accusations against my conduct or beliefs?
- ❷ How do I live in the consciousness of the brevity of life and the imminence of judgment?

**Activity:** Have the class discuss the community's perception of Seventh-day Adventists and possible misconceptions of Adventist believers. How can proactive steps be taken to avoid or correct such misconceptions? How can we represent Christ and His church more effectively to the community?

### ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** Many who are struggling with being accepted in their communities or who are facing adversity in their social settings find themselves dealing with self-esteem issues or even depression. Those who specialize in psychology have observed that one of the best ways of dealing with these issues is to reach out to and serve others. The joy and satisfaction of serving others who may be worse off than oneself provide a boost of brain chemicals—such as endorphins, dopamine, and oxytocin—that increase one's sense of pleasure, happiness, and contentment and help to reduce pain and stress. Benefits to self-esteem occur when those whom one has served express their appreciation. Peter's counsel to love one another deeply, to offer hospitality to one another without complaint, and to use whatever gift one has received to serve others is very much in line with this means of achieving the promised blessings.

**Activity:** Encourage the class to create a list of the imperatives and injunctions in 1 Peter 3:8–4:11, along with another list of the benefits and blessings that one can expect to accrue as a result of implementing the directives. Discuss one or two actions that the class can take in order to implement the counsels found in this lesson.

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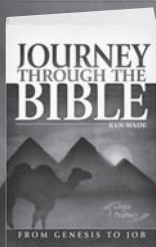
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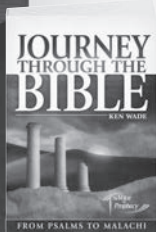
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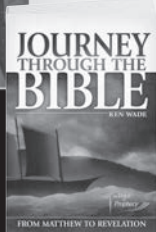
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# Suffering *for* Christ



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *1 Pet. 1:6, 3:13–22, 2 Tim. 3:12, 1 Pet. 4:12–14, Rev. 12:17, 1 Pet. 4:17–19.*

**Memory Text:** “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps” (*1 Peter 2:21, NKJV*).

**T**he history of persecution in the first few centuries of Christianity is well known. The Bible itself, especially the book of Acts, gives glimpses into what awaited the church. Persecution, with the suffering it brings, is also clearly a present reality in the life of the Christians to whom Peter is writing.

In the first chapter, Peter comments that “now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (*1 Pet. 1:6, 7, NKJV*). Almost the last comment in the letter also deals with the same idea: “And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to [H]is eternal glory in Christ, will [H]imself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you” (*1 Pet. 5:10, NRSV*).

Within the short epistle, there are no fewer than three extended passages that deal with his readers' suffering for Christ (*1 Pet. 2:18–25, 3:13–21, 4:12–19*). By any reckoning, then, the suffering caused by persecution is a major theme of 1 Peter, and to that we turn.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 6.



## Persecution of Early Christians

**Read** 1 Peter 1:6, 5:10. What is Peter talking about, and how did he tell his readers to respond to what they were facing?

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For the first few centuries, just being a Christian could result in a horrible death. A letter written to the Roman Emperor Trajan illustrates how precarious the safety of the early Christians was. The letter was from Pliny, who at the time of writing was governor of Pontus and Bithynia (A.D. 111–113), two of the regions mentioned in 1 Peter 1:1.

Pliny had written to Trajan asking for guidance regarding what to do about people who were accused of being Christians. He explained that those who insisted that they were Christians he had executed. Others said that although they had earlier been Christians, they no longer were. Pliny allowed them to prove their innocence by telling them to offer incense to statues of Trajan and other gods and to curse Jesus.

Worshiping a living emperor was rarely practiced in Rome, although in the eastern part of the Roman Empire to which 1 Peter is sent, the emperors allowed and sometimes encouraged the setting up of temples to themselves. Some of these temples had their own priests and altars on which sacrifices were made. When Pliny got Christians to show their loyalty to the Empire by offering incense and worship to a statue of the emperor, he was following a long-standing practice in Asia Minor.

There were times in the first century that Christians faced serious jeopardy for just being Christians. This was particularly true under emperors Nero (A.D. 54–68) and Domitian (A.D. 81–96).

Yet, the persecution pictured in 1 Peter is of a more local kind. Specific examples of the persecution Peter speaks of are few in the letter, but perhaps they include false accusations (*1 Pet. 2:12*) and reviling and reproach (*1 Pet. 3:9, 4:14*). While the trials were severe, they do not appear to have resulted in widespread imprisonment or death, at least at that time. Even so, living as a Christian would put believers at odds with significant elements of wider first-century society, and they could suffer because of their beliefs. Thus, Peter was addressing a serious concern when he wrote this first epistle.

## Suffering and the Example of Christ

**Read** through 1 Peter 3:13–22. How should Christians respond to those who would bring them suffering because of their faith? What is the connection between the sufferings of Jesus and the sufferings experienced by the believers because of their faith?

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When Peter says, “If you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you are blessed” (*1 Pet. 3:14, NKJV*), he is but echoing the words of Jesus: “‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake’” (*Matt. 5:10, NKJV*). He then says that Christians should not fear those who are attacking them, but they should sanctify (revere) Christ as Lord in their hearts (*1 Pet. 3:15*). This affirmation of Jesus in their own hearts will help to stanch the fear that they face from those opposing them.

He then suggests that Christians always should be able to explain the hope that they have, but to do so in an appealing way—with meekness and fear (“fear” is sometimes translated “reverence”; see *1 Pet. 3:15, 16*).

Peter insists that Christians should make sure that they do not provide others with a reason to accuse them. They must keep their consciences clear (*1 Pet. 3:16*). This is important, because then those who accuse a Christian will be put to shame by the blameless life of the Christian who is being accused.

Clearly, there is no merit in suffering for being a wrongdoer (*1 Pet. 3:17*). It is suffering for doing good, for doing the right thing, that makes the crucial difference. “For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil” (*1 Pet. 3:17, NKJV*).

Peter then used the example of Jesus. Christ Himself suffered for His righteousness; the holiness and purity of His life stood as a constant rebuke to those who hated Him. If anyone suffered for doing right and not wrong, it was Jesus.

But His suffering also brought about the only means of salvation. He died in the place of sinners (“the just for the unjust,” *1 Pet. 3:18*), so that those who believe in Him will have the promise of eternal life.

**Have you ever suffered, not because you had done wrong but because you had done right? What was the experience, and what did you learn about what it means to be a Christian and to reflect the character of Christ?**

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## The Fiery Trial

**Read** 1 Peter 4:12–14. Why does Peter say that they shouldn't be surprised at their suffering? See also 2 Tim. 3:12, John 15:18.

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Peter makes it clear that to suffer persecution for being a Christian is to partake of Christ's suffering. It is not something to be unexpected. On the contrary, as Paul would write: "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12, *NKJV*). Jesus Himself warned His followers about what they would face: " 'Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another' " (Matt. 24:9, 10, *NKJV*).

According to Ellen G. White: "So it will be with all who live godly in Christ Jesus. Persecution and reproach await all who are imbued with the Spirit of Christ. The character of the persecution changes with the times, but the principle—the spirit that underlies it—is the same that has slain the chosen of the Lord ever since the days of Abel."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 576.

**Read** Revelation 12:17. What does it say about the reality of persecution for Christians in the last days?

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No question, for a faithful Christian, persecution can be an ever-present reality, which is what Peter is dealing with here in warning his readers about the "fiery trial" they were facing.

Fire was a good metaphor. Fire can be destructive, but it also can clean away impurities. It depends on what is experiencing the fire. Houses are destroyed by fire; silver and gold are purified by it. Though one should never purposely bring on persecution, God can bring good out of it. Thus, Peter is telling his readers (and us): *Yes, persecution is bad, but don't be discouraged by it as if it were something unexpected. Press on ahead in faith.*

**What can we do to uplift, encourage, and even help those who are suffering for their faith?**

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## Judgment and the People of God

**Compare** 1 Peter 4:17–19 with Isaiah 10:11, 12 and Malachi 3:1–6.  
What are they saying in common?

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In all these passages, the process of judgment is portrayed as starting with the people of God. Peter even links the sufferings of his readers to the judgment of God. For him, the sufferings that his Christian readers are experiencing might be nothing less than the judgment of God, which begins with the household of God. “Therefore let those who suffer *according to the will of God* commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator” (1 Pet. 4:19, NKJV).

**Read** Luke 18:1–8. How does this help us understand God’s judgment?

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In biblical times, judgment was usually something highly desired. The picture of the poor widow in Luke 18:1–8 captures the wider attitude toward judgment. The widow knows that she will prevail in her case if only she can find a judge who will take her case. She has insufficient money and status to get her case heard, but she finally persuades the judge to hear it and to give her what she deserves. As Jesus says, “‘And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him?’” (Luke 18:7, NKJV). Sin has brought evil into the world, and God’s people throughout the ages have long waited for God to make things right again.

“ ‘Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested’ ” (Rev. 15:4, NKJV).

**Think of all the evil in the world that has gone, and still goes, unpunished. Why, then, is the concept of justice and God’s righteous judgment so crucial for us as Christians? What hope do you get from the promise that justice will be done?**

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## Faith Amid Trials

As we have seen, Peter was writing to believers who were suffering for their faith. And as Christian history has shown, things only got worse, at least for a while. Surely many Christians in the ensuing years found solace and comfort in what Peter wrote. No doubt, many do today, too.

Why the suffering? That, of course, is an age-old question. The book of Job, one of the first books of the Bible to be written, has suffering as a key theme. Indeed, if there was anyone (besides Jesus) who suffered not as “a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people’s matters” (*1 Pet. 4:15, NKJV*), it was Job. After all, even God said of Job: “ ‘Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?’ ” (*Job 1:8, NKJV*). And yet, look at what poor Job had endured, not because he was evil but because he was good!

**How** do these texts help answer the question of the origin of suffering?

*1 Pet. 5:8, Rev. 12:9, Rev. 2:10.*

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The short answer is that we suffer because we are in the midst of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. This is not a mere metaphor, a mere symbol for the good and evil in our natures. There is a real devil and a real Jesus fighting a real battle for human beings.

**Read** 1 Peter 4:19. How can what Peter wrote here help us in whatever we are struggling with now?

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When we suffer, especially when that suffering does *not* come directly as a result of our own evildoing, we naturally ask the question that Job had asked, again and again: *Why?* And, as is so often the case, we don’t have an answer. As Peter says, all we can do, even amid our suffering, is to commit our souls to God, trusting in Him, our “faithful Creator,” and continue in “doing good” (*1 Pet. 4:19, NKJV*).

**Why is knowing the character of God for yourself, knowing of His goodness and His love for you personally, such a crucial component for a Christian, especially one who is suffering? How can we all learn to come to know God and the reality of His love better?**

**Further Thought:** Sunday’s study talked about the persecution Christians faced. Here is a fuller excerpt from the letter written to the emperor about what Christians suffered in those early centuries: “The method I have observed towards those who have been denounced to me as Christians is this: I interrogated them whether they were Christians; if they confessed it I repeated the question twice again, adding the threat of capital punishment; if they still persevered, I ordered them to be executed. For whatever the nature of their creed might be, I could at least feel no doubt that contumacy and inflexible obstinacy deserved chastisement.

“Those who denied they were, or had ever been, Christians, who repeated after me an invocation to the Gods, and offered adoration, with wine and frankincense, to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for that purpose, together with those of the Gods, and who finally cursed Christ—none of which acts, it is said, those who are really Christians can be forced into performing—these I thought it proper to discharge. Others who were named by that informer at first confessed themselves Christians, and then denied it; true, they had been of that persuasion but they had quitted it, some three years, others many years, and a few as much as twenty-five years ago. They all worshipped your statue and the images of the Gods, and cursed Christ.”—*Pliny Letters* (London: William Heinemann, 1915), book 10:96 (vol. 2, pp. 401–403).

## Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What was the main issue that Christians faced, as revealed in the Pliny letter quoted above? What parallels can we see here with what will come in the last days, as revealed in the third angel’s message of Revelation 14:9–12? What does this tell us about some of the underlying issues in the great controversy itself?
- ❷ “Those who honor the law of God have been accused of bringing judgments upon the world, and they will be regarded as the cause of the fearful convulsions of nature and the strife and bloodshed among men that are filling the earth with woe. The power attending the last warning has enraged the wicked; their anger is kindled against all who have received the message, and Satan will excite to still greater intensity the spirit of hatred and persecution.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 614, 615. Though we don’t know when all this will happen, how can we always be ready to face opposition for our faith, in whatever form that opposition comes? What is the key to being prepared?

## God Is a Faithful Husband: Part 1

My husband died suddenly when I was 28, leaving me alone with five young children, no income, no home, no job, and many bills. I was so discouraged that I asked God to let me die, too.

I'm Elise Gwet, and I live in Cameroon in western Africa. My husband and I attended evangelistic meetings together and agreed that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is God's true church, that it teaches the truths of the Bible. He joined the Adventist Church at that time, but I didn't because I was concerned about my family's reaction. For one year I resisted my husband's gentle pleading and the Holy Spirit's call and continued attending my family's church on Sunday.

But God was speaking to me, and my husband gently led me. Together they touched my heart. My husband didn't deal harshly with the children or me because we weren't worshiping with him. When I cooked unclean food, he didn't become angry but would quietly tell me that he didn't eat these foods. He never forced the Sabbath on me but encouraged me to finish the housework, shopping, and cooking on Friday. He wanted me to rest on Sabbath even if I didn't go to church. My husband won me to the church through his actions and his love.

I eventually began attending church with him. His attitude and the Holy Spirit worked together to convict me of my errors. Members of the Adventist church also were praying for me. They came and visited me, and prayed and sang with me. I was impressed by their actions, too, and could no longer resist.

One Sabbath morning, I surprised my husband and told him that I and the children were going to church with him. He was so happy! When we arrived at church, the members were excited to see us. I began studying in the baptismal class and made my decision to be baptized.

On my baptism day, my husband said his joy was complete. He had a faithful wife, a strong faith, and at last the family was united in the truth. That day he said that if anything happened to separate us, if he should die someday, he hoped I would be faithful to God and the church. *But what could happen?* I wondered. The family was healthy; we had a home and food. What could go wrong?

*To be continued in next week's Inside Story.*

## The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Texts:** *1 Peter 4:12–14, 19*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Grasp the concept that trials and suffering are part of the expectation of the follower of Christ and should be viewed as both a privilege and a blessing.

**Feel:** Experience joy at knowing that trials are part of God’s plan for saving sinners.

**Do:** Commit himself or herself to a faithful Creator and continue to do good.

► **Learning Outline:**

### I. Know: Expect Trials and Suffering.

**A** Why should believers expect trials to be a normal part of the Christian life?

**B** How does Peter’s counsel line up with that of other New Testament texts? (See *Matt. 5:10–12; 24:9; John 15:20; 2 Cor. 12:10; 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Pet. 1:6, 7; James 1:2–4, 12.*)

### II. Feel: Rejoice When Enduring Trials.

**A** Why, according to Peter, should a believer rejoice when undergoing severe trials?

**B** How should we respond to being insulted as a result of the name of Christ?

### III. Do: Commit to Be Faithful.

**A** What is the difference between a desire to be faithful and a commitment to be faithful?

**B** Why does Peter mention our “faithful Creator” (*1 Pet. 4:19, NIV*)? (Compare with *Rev. 3:14.*) What are the implications for our commitment to faithfulness?

► **Summary:** Peter’s readers were instructed to expect some fiery ordeal to take place among them in order to test them, “for it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God” (*1 Pet. 4:17, NASB*). They were not to find it a strange thing but rather to rejoice that they would be participating in the sufferings of Christ and to commit themselves to a faithful Creator and continue to practice doing that which is right.



## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *1 Peter 4:12, 13, 19*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** God, who sees the end from the beginning, knows just what is best for us and for our spiritual growth. He sees the character-building process that trials and tests bring into our lives (*1 Pet. 1:6, 7; James 1:2–4*). Just as Jesus learned obedience and developed perfection of character by way of the things that He suffered (*Heb. 2:10; 5:8, 9*), so, too, can we mature through participation in the same, if we, as He did, commit ourselves to a faithful God and continue doing that which is right. This process of developing character through suffering is God’s merciful will for us (*1 Pet. 4:19*).

**Just for Teachers:** Many commentators have noted an apparent break in the text of 1 Peter between 4:11 and 4:12. Verse 11 ends with a doxology and “Amen.” Verse 12 opens with a noun of address, as if Peter were introducing a new discussion based on a recent event that has developed. Some have suggested that perhaps word has just come to Peter of the fires in Rome in the time of the Emperor Nero (A.D. 64) and that Peter sees this conflagration developing into a “fiery ordeal” (*NASB, NIV*) for his readers. The time would be about right for this event, although we have no way of knowing if Peter’s reference here is indeed to the burning of Rome. In any case, Peter foresees an imminent increase in the persecution that the believers are about to face. He also sees such persecution as a timely occurrence in the sequence of eschatological events (“The end of all things is near” [*1 Pet. 4:7, NIV*]). He draws on Ezekiel 9:6 for his conclusion: “For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God” (*1 Pet. 4:17, NASB*). Did not Jesus Himself predict such a scenario (*Matt. 24:9, John 16:2*)?

**Opening Activity and Discussion:** Have the class read 2 Timothy 3:12. Discuss the factors that tend to lead to persecution of God’s faithful people. What might account for the fact that class members either are or are not experiencing the anger of the dragon as described in Revelation 12:17?

### ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** The grammar of the Greek text of 1 Peter 4:12 does not make clear whether the fiery ordeal is a present experience, an

experience that is just beginning, or an experience that still lies in the future for Peter's readers. The fiery ordeal (*pyrōsis*) is described with two present participles, both of which could be descriptive presents (describing events already in progress), tendential presents (describing events just about to take place), or futuristic presents (describing events that still lie in the future but are viewed as anticipated in the present). Peter's comment in verse 17, however, that it is time for judgment to begin, has a fairly clear tendential sense. Also, the "if" clauses in verses 14–16 suggest an event that is anticipated but has not yet taken place.

## Bible Commentary

### I. Our Attitude Toward Suffering *(Review 1 Peter 4:12, 13 with your class.)*

Peter makes two key points in 1 Peter 4:12, 13. One is that we should not be surprised by trials and suffering, as though something strange were happening to us, for we have been forewarned (*John 15:18–21, 16:2–4*). The other is that we should rejoice when such suffering comes, because we are privileged to participate in the sufferings of Christ. When His glory is revealed (at His coming), our joy will be even greater (*1 Pet. 1:6, 7; James 1:2–4*). There is nothing we cannot handle, by God's grace, if we maintain this attitude.

**Consider This:** How should we respond to trials or suffering? Why should these things not take us by surprise?

### II. Our Experience in Suffering *(Review 1 Peter 4:14–16 with your class.)*

Verses 14 and 16 contain two "if" clauses, each of which is a true-to-fact condition (in Greek) and so assumes insult and suffering as facts, whether present or in the anticipated future. Peter advises his readers as to how they should deal with those real experiences, viewing insults for the name of Christ as blessings and suffering as a Christian as cause for praise to God. In between, in verse 15, Peter uses a prohibitive imperative construction, which has a volutative future sense, to advise his readers that none of them should suffer for wrongdoing. Rather, they should suffer without shame as a Christian, grateful that they are privileged to bear the name of Christ.

**Consider This:** The term *Christian* is used in the New Testament only here and in Acts 11:26 and 26:28. Non-Christians generally used it as a

term of contempt. In the days of the apostles, how might suffering for doing that which is right have helped to reorient the use of the term?

### III. A Time for Judgment (Review 1 Peter 4:17, 18 with your class.)

In 1 Peter 4:17, Peter provides the rationale for why his readers should expect a fiery ordeal at this time. He has already stated, “The end of all things is near” (1 Pet. 4:7, *NIV*). In his eschatology, he envisions a pre-Advent judgment, such as the one prophesied in Ezekiel 9, which will begin at the house of God (now the church rather than the temple). It will purify the members of God’s household by separating the wicked from those who “‘grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it’” (Ezek. 9:4, *NIV*). The fiery ordeal of persecution will accomplish just such a function. Ezekiel 9:6 records the words of the Lord: “‘Begin [the slaughter] at my sanctuary.’ So they began with the old men who were in front of the temple” (*NIV*). Quoting Proverbs 11:31 as precedent, Peter asks, “And if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?” (1 Pet. 4:17, *NIV*).

**Consider This:** In Ezekiel 8, we read that God shows the prophet, in vision, four great detestable things that are being committed in the house of God (the temple in Jerusalem), provoking Him to anger. Ezekiel 9 records the judgment of God on His people who have committed these abominations in His house. God instructs a man clothed in linen with a scribe’s inkpot by his side to go throughout the city and “‘put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it’” (Ezek. 9:4, *NIV*). Then six men with slaughtering weapons in their hands were told to follow the man in linen through the city and without mercy slay all. “‘But do not touch anyone who has the mark’” (Ezek. 9:6, *NIV*). Peter sees in this a type showing that judgment begins at the house of God. What does this mark symbolize, and why should God’s people earnestly seek to receive it?

#### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What is our attitude toward the trials and suffering in our own lives?
- ❷ Why must we entrust ourselves to God as our faithful Creator and continue doing that which is right, even while struggling with difficult tests and trials?

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Peter writes, quoting Proverbs 11:31, “ ‘If it is

hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?” ” (1 Pet. 4:18, NIV). This condition is true to fact, meaning that it is indeed with difficulty that a righteous person will be saved. What does Scripture mean when it makes this statement? Some have insisted that it is easier to be saved than to be lost. How should the Christian understand this issue?

### Thought Questions:

- ❶ If I find myself asking why I must endure trials in life, why is this attitude the wrong one?
- ❷ What needs to happen in my life in order to enable me to have the right attitude when tests and trials come? How am I currently responding to such trials?
- ❸ In what ways has God been a faithful, trustworthy Creator in my own life?

**Activity:** Discuss with the class the areas of the world where Christians are currently suffering persecution for their faith and the ways in which they are coping with persecution. Organize prayer groups to pray for them and for the members of the class who may be going through trials themselves or soon may be experiencing tests and trials.

## ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** Many of your class members personally may never have experienced significant persecution for the name of Christ, although most will have experienced some kind of trials in life. Peter is talking here not about trials of a general nature but about persecution specifically for being a Christian (1 Pet. 4:14, 16). It may be necessary to enter vicariously into the experience of others in order to empathize with the situation of Peter’s first readers. It would help to be able to share some contemporary, real-life stories with the class members in order for them to feel the sense of what others are going through even today. An example of a source for such stories is [www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories](http://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories).

**Activity:** If possible, obtain a world map and mount it on a large corkboard or similar backing. Begin identifying places around the world where stories of persecution for the name of Christ are taking place. Commit to pray in an ongoing way for the believers in these places, even uplifting the names of specific individuals who are undergoing persecution for their faith.

# Servant Leadership



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *1 Pet. 5:1–10, Acts 6:1–6, Jer. 10:21, Matt. 20:24–28, Prov. 3:34, Rev. 12:7–9.*

**Memory Text:** “Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (*1 Peter 5:7, NKJV*).

Studies of growing churches almost always highlight the importance of effective leadership. This leadership takes its vision from God and His Word and provides opportunity for everybody in the congregation to exercise his or her own spiritual gifts in pursuit of the gospel commission.

But church leadership is highly challenging. Volunteers, who often give of their time even though they already are busy, largely run churches. Members can “vote with their feet” by ceasing to attend if something happens that they cannot support. Furthermore, an effective Christian leader also must be deeply spiritual. And we shouldn't forget that Peter is writing to churches that are experiencing persecution. The church leader is particularly vulnerable at such times. Who, then, is equipped for this task?

In 1 Peter 5:1–10, Peter addresses the matter of Christian leadership on the local church level. In these verses, he writes about some of the crucial characteristics needed, not just in the local leaders but in members, as well. His words are as relevant for us today as they were then.

*\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 13.*

## Elders in the Early Church

**Look up the following texts:** *Acts 6:1–6, 14:23, 15:6, 1 Tim. 5:17, 1 Pet. 5:2. What insights do these verses give us regarding the challenges facing the early church and the role of its leaders?*

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A large group of people becoming believers and joining the church is a great blessing from God. Yet, as the experience of the earliest Christians illustrates, rapid growth can bring problems.

For instance, Acts 1–5 documents the leading of the Holy Spirit and the conversion of many to Christianity. Acts 6:1–6 shows the result: the group became too big for its leadership, and it needed to put structures in place in order to manage the day-to-day functions of the church.

The issue that brought this weakness in organizational structure to a head was a complaint of discrimination. The Greek-speaking group complained that its widows were neglected in the daily distribution of food. As a response, a group of people, the deacons, were especially appointed to assist the 12 apostles with the management of the church's resources.

It is true that the early church was led by the Holy Spirit in a special way. But even then there was a need to set up church structures. One key group of church leaders needed very early was the elders, who were established for each local congregation. In fact, appointing elders to lead these newly formed groups of Christians was something that Paul and Barnabas did as they went to places that had yet to hear about Jesus (*Acts 14:23*).

Elders were given many different roles in early Christianity. As leaders of their local community, from time to time they acted as instructors in teaching new converts. They preached, and they ensured that the necessary things were done for the well-being of the community (*Acts 15:6, 1 Tim. 5:17, 1 Pet. 5:2*).

**What are ways that you can learn to work better with the leaders in your local church, even when you don't always agree on things?**

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## The Elders

**Read** 1 Peter 5:1–4. What attitudes should leaders bring to their roles in the church? How can these principles apply to any of us, regardless of our role?

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Peter begins his instructions to elders by observing that he himself is a fellow elder. He then notes two things about himself: he is a witness of the suffering of Christ, and he is expecting to share in the glory to be revealed. In saying this, Peter highlights the first characteristic that should be found within an elder: an elder should understand the importance of what Christ has suffered in our behalf and what great hope He offers us.

Peter likens the role of an elder to a shepherd tending the flock of God. His comparing a church to sheep suggests that, like sheep, members can sometimes go off on their own. Thus, they need the shepherd to guide them back to the group and to help them work in harmony with it. The elder also should function as a humble example of how a Christian needs to act.

**What** warning do we find here for those who are shepherds? *Jer. 10:21, Ezek. 34:8–10, Zech. 11:17.*

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An important role of Christian leadership is to work with the people in the church as patiently as shepherds must work with their sheep. Elders must gently bring them together for worship and for sharing the message of Jesus with those who need to know Him and the salvation found in Him.

Peter also observes that elders should exercise oversight willingly and not under compulsion. It is not always easy to find people willing to take on the challenges of leading out in the church. This is particularly evident around nominating committee time. For a church to function well, there are a number of distinct roles that need to be filled. There are reasons that many people are reluctant to take on leadership roles. Some of these roles require a considerable investment of time, and people suitable for such roles already might have many commitments. Others may feel that they are not prepared well enough to take on the role. But Peter's word is that if asked, we should willingly take on leadership if it is at all possible.

## Servant Leadership

**Read 1 Peter 5:3 and Matthew 20:24–28.** What crucial principles of Christian leadership are found in these texts?

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In Greek, the key word in 1 Peter 5:3 is *katakuriueontes*. The same word also is found in Matthew 20:25 and means to “exercise dominion” or to “lord it” over someone. Thus, the instruction to elders given in 1 Peter 5:3 might be translated, “Do not lord it over those in your charge” (*NRSV*), and reflects the words of Jesus in Matthew 20:25.

Matthew 20:20–23 provides the context for the sayings of Jesus in Matthew 20:24–28. The mother of James and John had approached Jesus with the request that, when Jesus came into His kingdom, one son should sit at His right side and the other at His left.

“Jesus bears tenderly with them, not rebuking their selfishness in seeking preference above their brethren. He reads their hearts, He knows the depth of their attachment to Him. Their love is not a mere human affection; though defiled by the earthliness of its human channel, it is an outflowing from the fountain of His own redeeming love. He will not rebuke, but deepen and purify.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 548.

Jesus explains that this position of honor is one that is granted by the Father, not Him. But then He goes on to explain that a key difference between His kingdom and those of the Gentile nations is the type of leader that will emerge in His kingdom. Those who wish to lead in the kingdom where Jesus is King must become servants because the leaders in Jesus’ kingdom will be like Jesus. “‘The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many’” (*Matt. 20:28, NRSV*).

Thus, Peter is calling church leaders to the same ideal: the surrender and self-denial seen in Jesus must be revealed in them, as well.

**Read Philippians 2:4–8.** How does what Paul says here coincide with what Peter wrote? More important, how can we do the things that we are called to in these verses?

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## Clothed With Humility

Society was very stratified in the ancient world in which Peter lived. The ruling elite had what today might be called a “commanding presence.” Around them were clustered people of lower rank, and the lowest rank of all belonged to a slave. Humility was the proper attitude of those of lower rank toward those of a higher one. The Greek word for humility carries the meaning of “lowly,” “insignificant,” “weak,” and “poor.” It describes people without status and power in society. In the world outside of Judaism and Christianity, the word *humble* was associated with those of low status, and to act humbly would not necessarily have been commended as appropriate conduct of free people.

**Read 1 Peter 5:5–7. Given the context and time in which they lived, what is so remarkable about what Peter wrote here?**

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In the Bible, humility is seen in a different light from how it was seen in the times and culture in which Peter lived. Peter quotes Proverbs 3:34 from the Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament), a verse that is also quoted in James 4:6. In the Old Testament, part of God’s work in history is to lay low the high and mighty (*Isa. 13:11, 23:9, Job 40:11*).

One’s proper attitude toward God is humility. “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time” (*1 Pet. 5:6, NKJV*). Humility, rather than pride, should characterize the Christians’ relationships, not only with God but one another (*1 Pet. 5:5*).

Christians, even Christian leaders, are aware that they are sinners saved by God’s grace. In this most important sense, then, we are all equals, and before the cross we should all be humbled. And this humility must be revealed in our relationship with others, especially those over whom we have charge. Sure, anyone could be humble before God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth. Also, it’s relatively easy to be humble before those who are above us, who have power over us, and who are “higher” in status than we are. The true test comes when we reveal humility toward those who are “under” us, who have no power over us. That’s the kind of humility Peter is talking about here.

**What is it about the cross and what it represents that should always help keep us humble?**

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## Like a Roaring Lion

As we have seen already, Peter wrote against the backdrop of persecution. The great-controversy theme wasn't just abstract theology to his readers; they were experiencing it in a way that many of us have not, at least for now.

**Read 1 Peter 5:8–10 and Revelation 12:7–9. What do these texts teach us about the origin of evil and the work of Satan in our world?**

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The book of Revelation reveals that Christians play a part in a cosmic battle between the forces of good and the forces of evil. In Revelation, the forces of good are led by Jesus, who is the Word of God, the King of kings, and Lord of lords (*Rev. 19:13, 16*). The forces of evil are led by the devil, also called Satan and pictured as a dragon (*Rev. 12:7–9; 20:7, 8*). Though popular media and even some Christians deny the reality of Satan, the fact is that the devil is a powerful being who has only evil intentions for us. Yet, the good news is that the devil will ultimately be destroyed at the end (*Rev. 20:9, 10*).

Peter does not diminish the danger the devil represents. The devil is like a roaring lion that is looking to devour all whom he can (*1 Pet. 5:8*). Peter points out, too, that his readers can see the power of the devil in their own present suffering. Yet, this suffering will end in eternal glory (*1 Pet. 5:10*).

**Read 1 Peter 5:10 again. What is Peter saying to us there?**

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Though we don't know the exact nature of their trials, what we can see is the hope that Peter expresses. Yes, the devil is real. The battle is real, and our sufferings are real. But the "God of all grace" has defeated the devil. So whatever we are suffering, if we remain faithful—even unto death (*see Heb. 11:13–16*)—victory is assured, thanks to Jesus.

**How can we learn to hold on in faith, enduring to the end, regardless of what comes our way?**

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**Further Thought:** A great example of the servant leadership of Jesus is found in His behavior at the Last Supper. At that time, Jesus was fully conscious of who He was (the Son of God) and that He was about to return to His Father (*John 13:1*). After the meal He washed the feet of the disciples. He then said, “If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you” (*John 13:14, 15*). Each time the followers of Jesus wash one another’s feet, they not only reenact this scene, but they remind each other that to be a leader in Jesus’ kingdom one must become as a servant. No doubt, for the rest of their lives, especially after they better understood just who Jesus really was, the disciples remembered this act of humility on the part of their Master. No doubt, too, it was in Peter’s mind when he called on church elders not to lord it over others but to be “clothed in humility.”

“In consenting to become man, Christ manifested a humility that is the marvel of the heavenly intelligences. The act of consenting to be a man would be no humiliation were it not for the fact of Christ’s exalted pre-existence. We must open our understanding to realize that Christ laid aside His royal robe, His kingly crown, His high command, and clothed His divinity with humanity, that He might meet man where he was, and bring to the human family moral power to become the sons and daughters of God.

“The meekness and humility that characterized the life of Christ will be made manifest in the life and character of those who ‘walk even as he walked.’”—Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 81.

## Discussion Questions:

- ① Jesus began His ministry by confronting the devil. Weakened by 40 days of fasting, He was able to resist the devil’s temptations by quoting Scripture (*Matt. 4:1–11; Mark 1:12, 13; Luke 4:1–13*). What does this tell us about how we, too, can resist the devil in our own lives?
- ② What are examples you have seen of what appeared to be true humility in others? What can you learn from those examples?
- ③ In class, answer this question: Besides what Peter taught in the verses for this week, what are the qualities of a good Christian leader? How might those qualities overlap with good qualities in secular leaders? How might they differ?
- ④ How would you answer the claim that Satan is not real but just a symbol of the evil found in human nature?

## God Is a Faithful Husband: Part 2

Four months later my husband became ill, complaining of pain in his stomach and chest. He wanted to go to the hospital; so, I went to find someone who could take him there. While I was gone, he died in the arms of our two oldest children, seven and eight years old.

I returned to find my husband dead and my children crying and confused. I became angry with God. “How can this happen when I’ve just given my life to You?” I demanded to know. But no answer came. I wanted to die, too. Others had to care for my children and make the funeral arrangements. Somehow we made it through the funeral. Then the realization hit me: he is gone. I have no job and five children to care for. How will we survive?

We were renting a house, but soon after my husband’s funeral the landlord came to tell us we had to move. My husband’s oldest brother invited us to stay in his home. The relationship was stressful, and after nine months we left. My uncle rented a house for the children and me to live in, but I needed to work. My younger sister came to live with us and care for my children so I could work in the marketplace, buying wholesale vegetables and selling them at a profit. It was difficult, tiring work, the hours were long, and I earned very little. I began attending evening classes to learn a skill that would support my family better. Through all my trials, the brothers and sisters of the church supported me. People cared for my children while I worked and attended classes; others helped with food and money. God sent other compassionate friends to help, as well.

I wanted to share God’s love with others while I worked; so, I began selling Seventh-day Adventist literature. Every day, God provided what we needed and strengthened my faith. After a year, I was offered work in the Adventist publishing house.

I thank God for caring for us through these difficult times. When the children lost their father, God became their Father. He has supplied our needs and helped me train them. I taught them to love and glorify God, and they are faithful to Him.

*To be continued in next week’s Inside Story.*

## The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *1 Peter 5:1–6*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Recognize that humility is a key ingredient to effective leadership and service for others.

**Feel:** Appreciate the spirit of humility and loving service that Jesus exemplified, and desire to manifest the same toward others.

**Do:** Heed the appeal to humble oneself under the mighty hand of God so that He can use him or her effectively as needed.

► **Learning Outline:**

### I. Know: Effective Christian Leadership

**A** Peter appeals to church leaders to manifest what general spirit and attitude?

**B** Peter calls elders to fill what two specific functions? (*Compare with Acts 20:28.*)

### II. Feel: The Call to Humility and Service

**A** Peter advises elders to have what three specific attitudes in 1 Peter 5:2, 3?

**B** What attitude does Peter expect of all of his readers (*1 Pet. 5:5, 6*)?

### III. Do: Humble Yourself Under the Mighty Hand of God.

**A** In what ways can church leaders exemplify servant leadership while at the same time functioning as overseers?

**B** What does Peter expect of young men in the church in relation to the older men (*1 Pet. 5:5*)?

► **Summary:** Elders function as both shepherds (pastors) and overseers in the churches. Peter calls for a spirit of humility and service in leadership, as well as among all believers, whether young or old. God will exalt in due time those who humble themselves under His mighty hand.

## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *1 Peter 5:5, 6, 10*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The church needs good leaders who will be effective in their functions as both nurturers and overseers. As such they need to be humble, eager to serve, and ready to function as examples rather than as dictators. The elders are called to manifest this spirit of service. The youth are called to submit to this kind of leadership. And all are enjoined to clothe themselves with humility. A church congregation that manifests this spirit of humility and service will be made strong and steadfast as God exalts them before their community.

**Just for Teachers:** The early church had minimal organizational structure. The apostles were the earliest leaders, but the church rapidly outgrew the apostles' abilities to manage it effectively. Acts 6:1–6 describes the earliest attempt to draft additional leaders to share the responsibilities more effectively. These men were later called deacons, which means those who minister to the needs of others (*diakonoi*). Subsequently, the apostles also found a need to appoint spiritual leaders in each church congregation (*Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5*). These men were known as elders (*presbyteroi*)—literally, older men, men of age and experience. The apostles were itinerant leaders, while the elders were local church leaders. According to Acts 15, these two groups came together to represent the church for the first time at the Jerusalem Council.

**Opening Activity and Discussion:** Have the class read Acts 20:17, 18, 28–31. Discuss the functions that Paul expected these elders to have in the church, and compare them with the functions that Peter expected of the elders in the churches to which he was writing. What functions do the two descriptions have in common? What does this reveal about the terminology being used?

### ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** In 1 Peter 5:1–3, three special terms are used for church leaders—elders, overseers, and shepherds, the latter two of which are expressed in verbal form. These same three terms are used also in Acts 20:28. The first, “elders,” is discussed above. This designation was the general terminology used for local church leaders. In the Old Testament, elders served as counselors and judges for the people. Elders (“overseers” [NKJV]) were to have specific qualifications if they were to function as spiritual leaders in the New Testament church (*1 Tim.*

3:1–7, *Titus* 1:6–9). Peter refers to himself as a “fellow elder” (*sympresbyteros*), indicating his identification with them (*1 Pet. 5:1, NKJV*).

The second and third terms were functional, expressed in verbal form. “Shepherd” or “be shepherds” (*poimainō*, *1 Pet. 5:2*) describes a nurturing function. It also can be translated as “pastor” or “be pastors,” given that a pastor (*poimēn*) is one who leads a flock to pasture. In *1 Peter* 2:25, Jesus is called the Shepherd of our souls. In *1 Peter* 5:4, He is called the Chief Shepherd (*archipoimēn*), indicating that pastors and elders are to work under His authority and guidance. *Hebrews* 13:20 calls Jesus “that great Shepherd of the sheep” (*NIV*), just as He called Himself “ ‘the good shepherd’ ” (*John* 10:11, 14), making Himself the Example for others.

The other term used by Peter is “serving as overseers” (*1 Pet. 5:2, NKJV*), or “exercising oversight” (*episkopeō*, *NASB*), a term that indicates a supervisory or management function. In *1 Peter* 2:25, Jesus also is called the Overseer (*episkopos*) of our souls (*NIV*). The functions of spiritual leadership on the part of the elders are the same functions exercised by Jesus as He cares for our souls. It is not surprising then that *Hebrews* 13:17 admonishes believers, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account” (*ESV*).

## Bible Commentary

### I. Qualities of Effective Church Leaders (*Review 1 Peter 5:1–4 with your class.*)

As an elder himself, Peter appeals to his fellow elders to nurture the flocks of God that are under their care, exercising oversight so that none of Christ’s sheep will be lost. Then, when the Chief Shepherd returns, they will receive an unfading crown of glory. There are three conditions under which elders must serve: (1) willingly, not out of duty or obligation; (2) eagerly, with no expectation of financial gain; and (3) humbly, not driving their flock, but leading by example.

**Consider This:** In what ways did Jesus, the Chief Shepherd, model these three conditions?

### II. Counsels to the Members (*Review 1 Peter 5:5–7 with your class.*)

The younger men are expected to submit to the authority of those who are older, having the same spirit of putting the interests of others first. Such submission is in the spirit of Peter’s earlier counsels in *1 Peter* 2:13–3:7.

Finally, all are instructed to clothe themselves with humility in their

relationships, according to the admonition in 1 Peter 3:10–12, based on Proverbs 3:34. In view of God’s opposition to the proud and His willingness to give grace to the humble, all are advised to humble themselves before God and wait for Him to exalt them at the proper time. Although humility was then, and is now, generally associated with poverty and low social standing, the believers don’t need to worry over such things. They need only let God worry about their well-being, because He cares for them and can be trusted to meet their needs.

**Consider This:** What are some practical ways in which I can clothe myself with humility in my interpersonal relationships?

### III. Living in the Devil’s Domain (*Review 1 Peter 5:8–11 with your class.*)

God cares for us. At the same time, we must never forget that we live in enemy territory. Therefore, it behooves us to be self-controlled and alert, because our enemy, the devil, is like a hungry lion, prowling around “looking for someone to devour” (*1 Pet. 5:8, NIV*). Lions stealthily stalk their prey. They seek to keep hidden until the last-minute attack. We might not be aware of the danger unless we remain alert, clear minded, and self-controlled so that nothing impedes our ability to pray (*1 Pet. 4:7*). Not only do we need to remain alert and aware, but we are told also to “resist him, standing firm in the faith” (*1 Pet. 5:9, NIV*).

Peter reminds his readers that they are not alone in facing the wrath of the enemy, “because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings” (*1 Pet. 5:9, NIV*). Yet, Peter concludes, “After you have suffered a little while,” the God of all grace “will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast” (*1 Pet. 5:10, NIV*). Our strength is not in ourselves; it is in our God who called us to His eternal glory.

**Consider This:** Satan (the dragon) is especially angry with those in the last days who keep God’s commands and have the testimony of Jesus (*Rev. 12:17*). As soldiers of Christ, we need to be sober and alert. How may I live as a soldier for God in enemy territory?

#### Discussion Questions:

- ① What spirit do we display in our relationships with others, whether we are spiritual leaders, younger people, or any other church members?
- ② What steps are we taking to be alert, clear minded, and self-controlled? What are the ways in which we can be aware of the devil’s methods? How are we watching with prayer?



### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Today's church is much more highly structured than the early church was. This high degree of organization is necessary because of the complexities that exist in the church and in the world. Elders in the New Testament were essentially the same as pastors and overseers (*KJV*: “bishops”; see, for example, *1 Tim. 3:1, 2; Titus 1:7; and 1 Pet. 2:25*), exercising both functions. The only other spiritual leaders were apostles and deacons, although the deacons apparently handled more of the church's practical and material needs, while the apostles and elders exercised specifically spiritual or religious functions (*Acts 6:1–4; 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4; 1 Tim. 5:17*).

#### Thought Questions:

- ❶ What is the basis for our representative system of church organization, and what biblical principles are connected with it?
- ❷ Why may we have confidence in God's continued direction for leadership in His church? What interest does Jesus, the Chief Shepherd, have in leading His flock to safety?

**Activity:** Have the class read 1 Timothy 5:17 and Hebrews 13:7, 17. Discuss ways in which class members can show support and appreciation for the spiritual leaders of the church. Plan to put at least one tangible idea into action soon.

### ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** Many church members have little sense of the organizational structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church today and how it functions largely on the basis of representative elections and funding from the local level upward. Nor may they be aware that once the structure is in place for a given term, some balancing top-down controls do exist that may be implemented until the next elections at constituency meetings or a General Conference session. It may be helpful to review some basic concepts regarding the ways in which leadership and authority are established in the Adventist Church so that there will be a better understanding of the process and of why the church functions the way it does. The *Church Manual* is a helpful tool for understanding church organization.

**Activity:** If resources are available, create a flowchart of the levels of leadership and authority in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Show how authority flows in both directions in the organization of the church, with no single individual (other than Christ) or entity in possession of ultimate authority.

# Jesus in the Writings of Peter




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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *1 Pet. 1:18, 19; Col. 1:13, 14; Isa. 53:1–12; John 11:25; Ps. 18:50; 2 Pet. 1:1.*

**Memory Text:** “Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed” (*1 Peter 2:24, NKJV*).

As we have studied 1 Peter, it should be clear by now that regardless of the context, and whatever the specific issues he’s addressing, Peter’s focus was on Jesus. Jesus permeates all that he writes; He’s the golden thread woven through the letter.

From the first line, where Peter says that he is an “apostle” (“one sent”) of Jesus Christ, until the last, when he writes, “Peace to you all who are in Christ Jesus” (*1 Pet. 5:14, NKJV*), Jesus is his key theme. And in this epistle he talks about Jesus’ dying as our sacrifice. He talks about the great suffering that Jesus went through and uses Jesus’ example in that suffering as a model for us. He talks about the resurrection of Jesus and what it means to us. In addition, he talks about Jesus not only as the Messiah, the *Christos*, the “anointed one,” but about Jesus as the Divine Messiah. That is, we see in 1 Peter more evidence of the divine nature of Jesus. He was God Himself, who came in human flesh and who lived and died so that we can have the hope and promise of eternal life.

This week we will go back through 1 Peter and look more closely at what it reveals about Jesus.

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 20.

## Jesus, Our Sacrifice

An overarching theme of the Bible, maybe even *the* overarching theme, is that of God's work in saving fallen humanity. From the fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis to the fall of Babylon in Revelation, Scripture in one way or another reveals the work of God in seeking to save "that which was lost" (*Luke 19:10*). And this theme is revealed in Peter's letters, as well.

**Read 1 Peter 1:18, 19 and Colossians 1:13, 14. What does it mean to be redeemed, and what does blood have to do with redemption?**

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First Peter 1:18, 19 describes the significance of the death of Jesus this way: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." There are two key images in these words: redemption and animal sacrifice.

*Redemption* is used in the Bible in several ways. For example, the firstborn donkey (which could not be sacrificed) and the firstborn son (*Exod. 34:19, 20*) were redeemed by the sacrifice of a substitute lamb. Money could be used to buy back (redeem) items that had been sold because of poverty (*Lev. 25:25, 26*). Most important, a slave could be redeemed (*Lev. 25:47–49*). First Peter informs readers that the cost of buying them back (redeeming) from their "futile ways inherited from your fathers" (*1 Pet. 1:18, RSV*) was nothing less than the "precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish" (*1 Pet. 1:19*). The lamb image, of course, evokes the concept of animal sacrifice.

Peter thus likens Christ's death to that of a sacrificial animal in the Hebrew Bible. A sinner brought a sheep without blemish to the sanctuary. The sinner then laid his hands on the animal (*Lev. 4:32, 33*). The animal was slaughtered, and some of its blood was smeared on the altar; the rest was poured at the base (*Lev. 4:34*). The death of the sacrificial animal provided "atonement" for the one who offered the sacrifice (*Lev. 4:35*). Peter is saying that Jesus died in our place and that His death redeemed us from our former lives and the doom that would otherwise be ours.

**What does the fact that our hope of salvation exists only in a substitute punished in our place teach us about our utter dependence upon God?**

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## The Passion of Christ

Christians often talk about “the passion of Christ.” The word *passion* comes from a Greek verb that means “to suffer,” and the phrase *the passion of Christ* usually refers to what Jesus suffered in the final period of His life, beginning with the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Peter, too, dwells on the theme of Christ’s suffering in those last days.

**Read 1 Peter 2:21–25 and Isaiah 53:1–12. What do they tell us about what Jesus suffered on our behalf?**

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There is particular significance to the suffering of Jesus. He bore “our sins in His own body on the tree [a reference to the cross; compare with Acts 5:30], that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness” (1 Pet. 2:24, NKJV). Sin brings death (Rom. 5:12). As sinners, we deserve to die. Yet, the perfect Jesus—who had no guile on His lips (1 Pet. 2:22)—died in our place. In that exchange, we have the plan of salvation.

**Read Isaiah 53:1–12 again. What do the texts say that Jesus suffered as He worked out the plan of salvation in our behalf? What does this tell us about the character of God?**

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“Satan with his fierce temptations wrung the heart of Jesus. The Saviour could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror, or tell Him of the Father’s acceptance of the sacrifice. He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was to be eternal. Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race. It was the sense of sin, bringing the Father’s wrath upon Him as man’s substitute, that made the cup He drank so bitter, and broke the heart of the Son of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 753.

**What should our response be to what Christ has endured for us? How are we to follow His example, as 1 Peter 2:21 says?**

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## The Resurrection of Jesus

**Read** 1 Peter 1:3, 4, 21; 3:21; John 11:25; Philippians 3:10, 11; Revelation 20:6. To what great hope are these texts pointing, and what does it mean to us?

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As we have already seen, 1 Peter is addressed to those who are suffering because of their belief in Jesus. It is particularly appropriate, then, that right at the beginning of his letter Peter directs his readers' attention to the hope that awaits them. As he says, the hope of a Christian is a living hope, precisely because it is a hope that rests on the resurrection of Jesus (*1 Pet. 1:3*). Because of Jesus' resurrection, Christians can look forward to an inheritance in heaven that will not perish or fade (*1 Pet. 1:4*). In other words, no matter how bad things become, think about what awaits us when it is all over.

Indeed, Jesus' resurrection from the dead is a guarantee that we also can be raised (*1 Cor. 15:20, 21*). As Paul puts it, "And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins" (*1 Cor. 15:17*). But because Jesus has been raised from the dead, He has shown that He has the power to conquer death itself. Thus, the Christian hope finds its basis in the historical event of Christ's resurrection. His resurrection is the foundation of ours at the end of time.

Where would we be without that hope and promise? Everything that Christ did for us culminates in the promise of the resurrection. Without that, what hope do we have, especially because we know that contrary to popular Christian belief, the dead are in an unconscious sleep in the grave?

"To the Christian, death is but a sleep, a moment of silence and darkness. The life is hid with Christ in God, and 'when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.' John 8:51, 52; Col. 3:4. . . . [A]t His second coming all the precious dead shall hear His voice, and shall come forth to glorious, immortal life."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 787.

**Think about the apparent finality of death. It's so harsh, so unforgiving, and so real. Why, then, is the promise of the resurrection so important to our faith and to everything we believe in and hope for?**

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## Jesus as the Messiah

As we saw earlier, one of the crucial turning points in Jesus' earthly ministry was when, in response to a question about who He was, Peter answered: " 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God' " (*Matt. 16:16, NKJV*). The word *Christ* (*Christos* in Greek) means the "anointed," the "Messiah"; in Hebrew it is *mashiyach*. It came from a root word that means "to anoint," and it was used in various contexts in the Old Testament. (It was even used in one place to point to a pagan king, Cyrus [*see Isa. 45:1*].) Thus, when Peter called Jesus the Christ, he was using a word that expresses an ideal derived from the Hebrew Scriptures.

**Read** the following texts from the Old Testament that use the word *Messiah* or *anointed*. What does the context teach us about what it means? How might Peter have understood what it meant when he called Jesus the Messiah?

*Ps. 2:2* \_\_\_\_\_

*Ps. 18:50* \_\_\_\_\_

*Dan. 9:25* \_\_\_\_\_

*1 Sam. 24:6* \_\_\_\_\_

*Isa. 45:1* \_\_\_\_\_

Though Peter had been inspired by the Lord to declare Jesus as the Messiah (*Matt. 16:16, 17*), there's no question that he didn't fully understand what this meant. He didn't understand who exactly the Messiah was, what He was to accomplish, and, perhaps most important, how He would accomplish it.

In that lack of understanding, Peter was not alone. There were many different ideas in Israel about the Messiah. In and of themselves, the uses of the word *Messiah* or *anointed* in the above texts don't present a full picture, however much they might foreshadow what the Messiah would ultimately be and do.

John 7:42 reveals some of what was expected of the Messiah: He would be descended from David, from the town of Bethlehem (*Isa. 11:1–16, Mic. 5:2*). That part they got right. In the popular imagination, however, a Messiah from the line of David would do what David did: defeat the enemies of the Jews. What no one expected was a Messiah who would be crucified by the Romans.

Of course, by the time he wrote his epistles, Peter more clearly understood Jesus as the Messiah (He is called Jesus *Christ* 15 times in 1 and 2 Peter) and all that He would accomplish for humanity.

## Jesus, the Divine Messiah

Peter knew not only that Jesus was the Messiah but that He was the Lord, as well. That is, by the time of these epistles, Peter knew that the Messiah was God Himself. Though the title “Lord” can have a secular meaning, the term also can be a clear reference to divinity. In 1 Peter 1:3 and 2 Peter 1:8, 14, 16, Peter is referring to Jesus, the Messiah, the Christ, as the Lord, as God Himself.

Like other writers in the New Testament, Peter describes the relationship between Jesus and God with the words *Father* and *Son*. For example, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:3, *NKJV*; compare 2 Pet. 1:17). Jesus is described as the beloved Son (2 Pet. 1:17), and some of Jesus’ authority as Lord, and His heavenly status, comes from this special relationship that He has with God the Father.

**Read** 2 Peter 1:1, John 1:1, and John 20:28. What do these texts tell us about the divinity of Jesus?

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Second Peter 1:1 says “our God and Savior Jesus Christ” (*NKJV*). In the Greek original, the same definite article (that is, “the”) is used for both God and Savior. Grammatically this means that both “God” and “Savior” are used of Jesus. Second Peter 1:1, then, stands as one of the very clear indications in the New Testament of the full divinity of Jesus.

As the early Christians struggled to understand Jesus, they gradually put the evidence of the New Testament together. In the writings of Peter, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct (for example, Father/Son: 1 Pet. 1:3, 2 Pet. 1:17; Holy Spirit: 1 Pet. 1:12, 2 Pet. 1:21), as indeed they are in the rest of the New Testament. Yet, at the same time, Jesus is portrayed as fully divine, as is the Holy Spirit. Over time, and after much discussion, the church developed the doctrine of the Trinity to explain as well as possible the divine mystery of the Godhead. Seventh-day Adventists include the doctrine of the Trinity as one of their 28 fundamental beliefs. Thus, we see in Peter a clear depiction of Jesus, not only as the Messiah but as God Himself.

**When you think about the life and death of Jesus and then realize that *He was God*, what does this tell you about the kind of God we serve and why we should love and trust Him? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.**

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**Further Thought:** “It seems logical to begin with ‘Messiah,’ since the Christian church owes its name to the Greek equivalent *Christos*, the ‘Anointed One.’ The Hebrew word relates to the deliverer figure whom the Jews awaited and who would be God’s agent in the inauguration of a new age for God’s people. Both the Hebrew and the Greek terms are derived from roots meaning ‘to anoint.’ Evidently, by calling Him ‘Christ,’ the New Testament writers regarded Jesus as specially set aside for a particular task.

“The title *Christos* occurs more than 500 times in the NT. Although there was more than one concept of Messiahship among Jesus’ contemporaries, it is generally recognized that by the first century Jews had come to look on the Messiah as someone in a special relationship with God. He would usher in the end of the age, when the kingdom of God would be established. He was the one through whom God would break through into history for the deliverance of His people. Jesus accepted the title ‘Messiah,’ but did not encourage its use; for the term carried political overtones that made its use difficult. Though reluctant to avail Himself of it in public to describe His mission, Jesus rebuked neither Peter (*Matt. 16:16, 17*) nor the Samaritan woman (*John 4:25, 26*) for using it. He knew Himself to be the Messiah, as seen in Mark’s report of Jesus’ words about giving one of His disciples a cup of water ‘because you bear the name of Christ’ (*Mark 9:41*).”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 12, p. 165.

## Discussion Questions:

- 1 Read Isaiah 53:1–12. According to this passage, what has Jesus done for us? Write down the specifics of what He has done on our behalf. In what ways can we clearly see in these verses the idea of Jesus as our Substitute? Why do we need Him as our Substitute?
- 2 Throughout history, some have used the biblical promise of an afterlife to help keep people oppressed. *Well, yes, your life is hard here and now, but just focus on what God has promised for us when Jesus returns.* Because this truth taught in the Word of God has been abused, many reject the Christian notion of an afterlife; instead, they see it merely as a ploy by some people to oppress others. How would you respond to that charge?
- 3 In class, go over your answer to Thursday’s question about Christ’s divinity and what it tells us about the character of God. Why is His divinity and what it does reveal about God such good news?



## God Is a Faithful Husband: Part 3

Through the years, God has given me special evidences of His love. Long before I married, I heard a young man play the piano. I was so impressed that I told God that if I had children, I would want them to learn to play the piano for His glory. God answered that prayer. My daughter is truly a gifted musician. I could never afford piano lessons, but she has a natural musical ability. She has a friend who owns a piano, and when she visited their home they allowed her to play. She has never had a formal piano lesson, but God has been her teacher. She plays beautifully and has been recognized nationally for her playing, and best of all, she gives God the glory. She plays for the church, and many people come to the church just to hear her play.

I never had enough money to save for an emergency. Then one day, my son was riding a bicycle and was hit by a driver who fled the scene. Someone brought my son home with injuries to his collarbone and plenty of scrapes and bruises.

That day my brother-in-law, who is a doctor, had come to visit. Twice he had stood up to leave; then without explanation, he sat down again. He was standing to leave when the people brought my injured son home. My brother-in-law attended to him and took the boy to the hospital. He gave him medical care and even bought the medicines that my son needed. Then he brought my son back home. He told me, "I hadn't planned to stay long this morning, but something—or Someone—told me to stay. Now I understand that the voice I heard was God's."

Yes, I can truly say that God is my husband. He provides for me and cares for me. My children are His, and I give Him all the glory for taking me, a young widow, through a difficult time into victory in His name. To God be the glory.

The Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter is going to the West-Central Africa Division. The offering will help to build a special youth multipurpose center at Babcock University in Nigeria and a Seventh-day Adventist mission academy in the country of Gabon. Thank you for supporting mission through your generous offerings.

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ELISE GWET *lives and works in Yaoundé, Cameroon.*

## *The Lesson in Brief*

► **Key Text:** *1 Peter 1:18–21*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** See that Jesus Christ is at the center of Peter’s theology and teaching, including His Messiahship, His suffering and death, His resurrection, and His second coming.

**Feel:** Grasp the privilege of being called by God to participate in the sufferings of Christ, and experience faith and hope in the glory that is to be revealed in us at His return.

**Do:** Forsake an empty way of life and do faithfully that which is right, serving others in love.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: Jesus as Messiah, Redeemer, and Lord**

**A** What specific aspects of Jesus’ life and ministry does Peter highlight in this epistle?

**B** What seems to be the central focus of Peter’s references to Jesus’ life and ministry?

**II. Feel: The Call to Follow in Jesus’ Steps**

**A** In what specific context does Peter call his readers to follow in the footsteps of Jesus?

**B** How does Jesus’ fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies influence our decisions about following Jesus today?

**III. Do: Preparing for Jesus’ Return**

**A** What does Peter advise his readers to do as they prepare for Jesus’ return?

**B** How do we view the coming judgment? Is it with fear or with eager anticipation? Discuss.

► **Summary:** Peter weaves a clear message about Jesus into all of his discussions. Jesus is the Divine Messiah of Old Testament prophecy, sent to redeem His people from their sinful ways of life by the sacrifice of Himself. He was resurrected from the dead and will soon be revealed again in glory. The Christian’s hope is in Him.

## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *1 Peter 1:3–9*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** God has begotten the Christian to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This hope includes an inheritance in heaven that can never perish, spoil, or fade. It is preserved for us who are shielded through faith by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that will be revealed at the return of Christ. We praise God with joy because of this hope of salvation, and our conduct is transformed by the anticipation of the glories to be revealed in us. We love Jesus, and we love one another. We endure trials with patient endurance. We trust God and His Word, and, finally, we receive the goal of our faith, the salvation of our souls.

**Just for Teachers:** Jesus transformed Peter’s life. Peter was naturally bold and brash, impetuous and outspoken. He often spoke before giving careful thought to his words. As a result, he made promises he couldn’t keep and ended up denying his Lord. However, unlike Judas, instead of losing hope and giving up, Peter repented and sought a new experience with Christ, becoming one of His most ardent followers and advocates. Peter was perhaps the most prominent leader in the early church, at least until Paul became prominent as an apostle to the Gentiles. Paul considered Peter to be one of the main “pillars” of the church (*Gal. 2:9, NKJV*). Peter knew who Jesus was and the power of Jesus in the life. It is not surprising that his epistle is filled with passages that speak of the importance of Jesus in the life of the believer.

**Opening Activity and Discussion:** Ask the class to read together 1 Peter 1:3–9, 18–21. Invite members to identify the various elements of the salvation process that are mentioned in these passages and their connection to the life and work of Jesus.

### ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** The life and work of Jesus permeate Peter’s first epistle. But the central focus of Jesus’ life and work is found in 1 Peter 3:18, namely, the substitutionary death of Jesus for our sins and His subsequent resurrection to life in the Spirit. There are ten

explicit references to the suffering and death of Jesus in the epistle (*1 Pet. 1:2, 11, 19; 2:21, 23, 24; 3:18; 4:1, 13; 5:1*), with at least one reference in each chapter. And there are four explicit references to His resurrection (*1 Pet. 1:3, 21; 3:18, 21*). In addition, there is one reference to His ascension (*1 Pet. 3:22*), and five to His second coming (*1 Pet. 1:5, 7, 13; 5:1, 4*).

## Bible Commentary

### I. The Suffering and Death of Jesus (*Review together 1 Peter 1:18, 19; 2:24; 3:18.*)

The majority of the references to the life and work of Jesus refer to His suffering and death. His suffering is mentioned the most, largely as an example for those who also are suffering (*1 Pet. 1:11, 12; 2:21–23; 4:1, 13–16*), but the death of Jesus as a sacrifice for our sins is theologically more significant for our eternal salvation (*1 Pet. 1:18, 19; 2:24; 3:18*). These passages teach a substitutionary atonement to pay the redemption price for our sins. Apart from the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus, there would be no provision for our salvation. This arrangement is the only way we can approach God (*1 Pet. 3:18; John 14:6; Acts 4:10–12; Heb. 9:27, 28; 10:19–22*).

**Consider This:** How much time daily or weekly do I spend in contemplation of the suffering and death of Jesus?

### II. The Resurrection of Jesus (*Review 1 Peter 1:3, 21; 3:18, 21 with your class.*)

As important as the death of Jesus was for our salvation, it would have been ineffective apart from His resurrection (*1 Pet. 1:3; 3:21; 1 Cor. 15:14, 17–19*). We have hope of eternal life because He is not dead but is risen (*Matt. 28:5, 6; Luke 24:5, 6*), and He has become “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (*1 Cor. 15:20, NIV*). It is in His resurrection that we have the assurance of the potential for our resurrection to eternal life. Peter clearly understands this principle and holds it up before his readers as the basis for their hope—no matter the suffering, or even death, they may undergo in this life.

**Consider This:** In Romans 6:4 Paul makes the resurrection of Jesus not only our hope of eternal life hereafter but also a type of our new spiritual life in the present. What is the hope of our eternal life founded upon?

### III. Christ's Ascension and Return (Review together 1 Peter 1:5, 7, 13; 3:22; 5:1, 4.)

In addition to the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus, Peter points to a couple of other important events in Jesus' life and work. In 1 Peter 3:22, he refers to Jesus' ascension, and even hints at His high priestly ministry, when he states that He "is at God's right hand" (*NIV*; compare with *Acts 5:31; Heb. 8:1; 9:24; and 10:11, 12*). Then he refers five times to Christ's second coming, which he speaks of as His revelation in glory at the last time (*1 Pet. 1:5, 7, 13; 5:1*), or His appearing (*1 Pet. 5:4*). This appearing in glory is the culmination of all of the hopes of the Christian (*Titus 2:13*). It will be the blessed inheritance that has been reserved in heaven for us, and it is that which we have been looking for and to which we were called (*1 Pet. 1:4, 3:9*).

**Consider This:** Jesus generally was known as Jesus Christ (*Christos*, the Anointed One, the Messiah). Thus, Peter repeatedly proclaims that Jesus is the promised Messiah of Old Testament prophecy, and he explicitly points it out in 1 Peter 1:10–12. In what ways is Jesus the promised Messiah—with all that this designation connotes—for me?

#### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What role does Peter's reference to the Old Testament prophets and their predictions in 1 Peter 1:10–12 play in his focus on Jesus and His life and ministry?
- ❷ In pointing to Jesus' sufferings and death as a primary focus of his epistle, why does Peter also take the opportunity, in 1 Peter 3:15, to enjoin his readers to "revere Christ as Lord" in their hearts (*NIV*)?

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** We often find it easier to focus on doctrinal issues than on relational issues. This week's lesson focuses on both, looking at some events in the life of Jesus that are important for our salvation, and also at Peter's personal relationship with Jesus that was transformative for his own life and ministry. In teaching this lesson, make sure that the relational issues are not overlooked in favor of the texts that point to the doctrinal issues for salvation. Find opportunity to discuss Peter's relationship with Jesus, which led him to keep Jesus central in his epistle. Do not neglect to personalize Peter's relationship with Jesus. In what ways have we set apart Christ as Lord in our hearts?

**Thought Questions:**

① What were the critical factors in Peter's conversion that made him the spiritual leader that he turned out to be, with Jesus at the center of his teaching and his hope?

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② Having set apart Jesus as Christ and Lord in the heart, we must strive for a meaningful relationship with Him. If we have not done so, what can we do to enter into a living hope in Jesus?

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**Activity:** Have the class read together 1 Peter 4:1, 2, 7, 8; 5:6–10. Discuss the ways in which the example of Jesus should have a transformative influence in our lives as it did in the life of Peter. How will our community view our relationships with Jesus, based on what they observe of our lives? What changes do we need to make?

**►STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Peter begins his epistle by pointing to the changes that God wants to make in our lives. God has chosen us, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling (metaphorical cleansing) by His blood (*1 Pet. 1:2*). “In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade” (*1 Pet. 1:3, 4, NIV*). After describing how these changes are to take place in our lives and how we can lay claim to that living hope, Peter closes his epistle by assuring his readers that the God of all grace “will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast” (*1 Pet. 5:10, NIV*). “This [restoration],” he assures his readers in 1 Peter 5:12, “is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it” (*NIV*).

**Activity:** Develop with the class a strategy by which the true grace of God—as revealed through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ—can be proclaimed to your church's community, offering them a new birth to a living hope and an inheritance that will not perish or fade with time. How can the message of 1 Peter play a role in that strategy?

# Be Who You Are




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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *2 Pet. 1:1–15, Eph. 2:8, Rom. 5:3–5, Heb. 10:38, Rom. 6:11, 1 Cor. 15:12–57.*

**Memory Text:** “For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love” (*2 Peter 1:5–7, NIV*).

One of the astonishing things about the New Testament is how much truth can be “crammed” into a very limited amount of space. Take this week’s lesson, which covers 2 Peter 1:1–14. In these 14 verses, Peter teaches us about righteousness by faith. He then gets into what God’s power can do in the lives of those who have given themselves to Jesus. He talks about the amazing truth that we can become “partakers of the divine nature” (*2 Pet. 1:4*) and that we can be free from the corruption and lust of the world.

In fact, not only do we get a kind of catalog of Christian virtues, but Peter presents them in a specific order. One follows another, which follows another, and so forth until they climax into the most important one of all.

He also writes about the reality of what it means to be in Christ and to be “cleansed” (*2 Pet. 1:9, NIV*) from our old sins, and then even brings in the idea of assurance of salvation, the promise of eternal life in “the everlasting kingdom” (*2 Pet. 1:11*) of the Lord.

And finally, we even get a little discourse on the crucial topic of the state of the dead. What a lot of rich and deep truth in just 14 verses!

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 27.

## A Precious Faith

**Read** 2 Peter 1:1–4. What does Peter say that we have been given in Jesus Christ? That is, how is the reality of grace seen here?

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Peter begins this letter by saying that it is addressed to those who “have obtained like precious faith with us” (2 Pet. 1:1, *KJV*); or “a faith of equal standing with ours” (*RSV*). The word translated as “precious” means “of equal value” or “of equal privilege.” He says that they have “obtained” this precious faith; not that they earned it or deserved it but that they have received it, a gift from God. Or, as Paul has written: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8, *NKJV*). It’s precious because “without faith it is impossible to please” God (Heb. 11:6). It’s precious because by this faith we lay hold of many wonderful promises.

Peter emphasizes that the “divine power” of Jesus has given to us everything that concerns life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). Only through the power of God do we even exist, and only through His power can we attain holiness. And this divine power is given us “through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue” (2 Pet. 1:3, *NKJV*; see also John 17:3).

We are called to love God, but how can we love a God we don’t know? We come to know God through Jesus, through the Written Word, through the created world, and through the experience of living a life of faith and obedience. We know God and the reality of God as we experience what He does in our lives, a knowledge that will change us. And we come to know Him through the reality of the grace that He bestows upon us.

Peter then says something even more incredible: that we have also been given “great and precious promises,” which include becoming partakers of the “divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4). Humanity was originally created in the image of God; that image has been greatly defaced and degraded. When we become born again, we have a new life in Jesus, who works to restore His divine image in us. But we must flee the world’s corruption and lusts if we want this change to occur.

**What would your life be like if you were devoid of faith? How does this answer help us to understand why the gift of faith is indeed precious?**

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## Love, the Goal of Christian Virtue

**Read** 2 Peter 1:5–7; Romans 5:3–5; James 1:3, 4; and Galatians 5:22, 23. What similar theme appears in these texts?

It was common among philosophers in the ancient world to list virtues. Such lists are often called a “catalogue of virtues,” and there are several examples in the New Testament (*Rom. 5:3–5; James 1:3, 4; Gal. 5:22, 23*). It was highly likely that Peter’s readers were familiar with such lists, although there are interesting differences between what a philosopher might list and what Peter lists. Note that Peter has arranged these deliberately in a sequence, so that each virtue builds on the previous virtue, until it reaches a climax in love!

Each of the virtues Peter uses has significant meaning:

*Faith:* In this context, faith is nothing less than a saving belief in Jesus (see *Gal. 3:11, Heb. 10:38*).

*Virtue:* Virtue (Greek *arête*), a good quality of any kind, was heralded even among pagan philosophers. Yes, faith is crucial, but it must lead to a changed life, one in which virtue is expressed.

*Knowledge:* Peter surely isn’t talking of knowledge in general but rather the knowledge that comes from a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

*Temperance/Self-control:* Mature Christians are able to control their impulses, particularly those impulses that lead to excesses.

*Patience/Steadfastness:* Steadfastness is endurance, especially in the face of trials and persecution.

*Godliness:* In the pagan world, the word translated here as “godliness” means ethical behavior that results from a belief in a god. Within the New Testament it also carries the concept of ethical behavior that results from belief in the one true God (*1 Tim. 2:2*).

*Brotherly kindness:* Christians are like a family, and godliness will lead to a community in which people are kind to one another.

*Love:* Peter brings the list to a climax with love. He sounds like Paul, too: “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (*1 Cor. 13:13, NKJV*).

**Before Peter begins the list of virtues, he says that we should “make every effort” (2 Pet. 1:5, NET) to attain these virtues. What does he mean by that? What part does human effort play in our desire to live godly, faithful lives?**

## Be Who You Are

After giving us the list of what we should diligently seek for as Christians, Peter then declares what the result will be.

**Read 2 Peter 1:8–11.** What is the link between what has already been done for a Christian and how a Christian should be living?

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Peter urges his readers to live according to the new reality that is true for them in Jesus. The characteristics of faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love “are yours and abound” (2 Pet. 1:8, NKJV).

The problem is that not all Christians live according to this new reality. Some are ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:8). Such people have forgotten that they were cleansed from “old sins” (2 Pet. 1:9, NKJV). So, says Peter, Christians should live out the new reality that is true for them in Jesus. In Christ, they have received forgiveness, cleansing, and the right to partake in the divine nature. Therefore they must “give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (2 Pet. 1:10). There’s no excuse for living as they had done before, no excuse for being “barren” or “unfruitful” Christians.

“We hear a great deal about faith, but we need to hear a great deal more about works. Many are deceiving their own souls by living an easy-going, accommodating, crossless religion.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 50.

**Read Romans 6:11.** What does Paul say here that reflects what Peter wrote in the texts for today?

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In a sense, both Peter and Paul say, “Be what you are.” And we are new creatures in Christ, cleansed from sin, and partakers of the divine nature. That’s why we can live the kind of life that we are called to. We are supposed to be like Christ, which is what *Christian* means.

**How “like Christ” are you? In what areas can you do better?**

## Shedding the Tent

**“Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me” (2 Pet. 1:13, 14, NKJV).**

In 1956, Oscar Cullmann wrote a short study called *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead? The Witness of the New Testament*. He argued that the concept of the resurrection is quite incompatible with the concept of the immortal soul. Furthermore, he said that the New Testament lies squarely on the side of the resurrection of the dead.

“No other publication of mine,” he later wrote, “has provoked such enthusiasm or such violent hostility.”

**Read 1 Corinthians 15:12–57. What does Paul imply happens in death?**

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A study of what the New Testament says about death and resurrection has convinced most New Testament scholars that Cullmann was correct. The New Testament indeed assumes the concept of resurrection, not the concept of an immortal soul that survives the death of the body. For example, in 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18, Paul urges those who have lost loved ones to death to be comforted with the knowledge that when Jesus returns again, He will raise the dead. In 1 Corinthians 15:12–57, Paul gives an extended description of resurrection. He begins by pointing out that Christian faith is based on the resurrection of Jesus. If Jesus was not raised, then any faith in Him is futile. But, says Paul, Christ has indeed risen from the dead, as the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. And Christ’s resurrection from the dead makes it possible for all those in Him to rise from the dead, as well.

Paul talks about the resurrection body in 1 Corinthians 15:35–50. He contrasts the new bodies we will receive in the resurrection with our present bodies. What we have now will die; what we will have in the resurrection never will.

In summary, when the New Testament talks about death, it does so in terms of resurrection, not immortality of the soul. This is important to know as a background to reading 2 Peter 1:12–14.

## Faith in the Face of Death

**Read** 2 Peter 1:12–15. What does Peter mean when he suggests that he is soon to put off his tent/body?

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Second Peter 1:12–14 reveals the occasion of the letter. Peter thinks he is about to die, and the letter contains his last message or testament.

That Peter expects to die soon is revealed by the phraseology “as long as I am in this tabernacle. . . . Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle,” which is found in 2 Peter 1:13, 14. Peter likens the body to a tent (tabernacle), which he will put off as he dies. In fact, it is so clear that Peter means his body when he refers to putting off his tent that modern translators tend to translate these phrases as “as long as I am in this body . . . since I know that my death will come soon” (2 Pet. 1:13, 14, *NRSV*). Nothing in Peter’s language suggests that when Peter “puts off” his tent or body, his soul will survive as a separate entity.

**Read** 2 Peter 1:12–15 again. How does Peter appear to deal with the reality of his impending death, and what does that attitude teach us about faith?

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Second Peter 1:12–15 gives added solemnity to Peter’s words. He writes this in the knowledge that his life will soon come to an end. He knows this because, as he said, the “Lord Jesus showed me.” Yet, there seems to be no fear, no worry, no foreboding. His emphasis, instead, is on the well-being of those whom he is leaving behind. He wants them to be firm in the “present truth,” and—as long as he is alive—he is going to admonish them to be faithful.

We can see here the reality and depth of Peter’s experience with the Lord. Yes, he’s going to die soon, and it will not be a pleasant death, either (see *John 21:18*; Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 537, 538), but his unselfish concern is about the benefit of others. Truly, Peter was a man living out the faith that he taught.

**How does our faith help us deal with the terrible reality of death?  
How can we learn to cling to the wonderful hope we have, even in  
the face of death, because of what Jesus has done for us?**

**Further Thought:** As we saw, Peter knew that he was soon to die. And he knew (and for a long time, too) how he was going to die. That's because Jesus Himself had told him. " 'Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish' " (*John 21:18, NKJV*).

What was his end?

"Peter, as a Jew and a foreigner, was condemned to be scourged and crucified. In prospect of this fearful death, the apostle remembered his great sin in denying Jesus in the hour of His trial. Once so unready to acknowledge the cross, he now counted it a joy to yield up his life for the gospel, feeling only that, for him who had denied his Lord, to die in the same manner as his Master died was too great an honor. Peter had sincerely repented of that sin and had been forgiven by Christ, as is shown by the high commission given him to feed the sheep and lambs of the flock. But he could never forgive himself. Not even the thought of the agonies of the last terrible scene could lessen the bitterness of his sorrow and repentance. As a last favor he entreated his executioners that he might be nailed to the cross with his head downward. The request was granted, and in this manner died the great apostle Peter."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 537, 538. And yet, even with this prospect before him, Peter's concern was for the spiritual well-being of the flock.

## Discussion Questions:

- 1 In light of all that Peter (and the rest of the Bible writers, too) has written about the need for Christians to live holy lives, why do so many of us fail to "be what we are" in Jesus?
- 2 In class, go over the list given in 2 Peter 1:5–7. Talk about each item and ask yourself: How can we better manifest these virtues ourselves, and how can we help others who seek to do the same?
- 3 Considering what we know about Peter, as revealed in the Gospels, what he writes does show powerfully the great work that Christ did in him, even despite his previous failings. What hope and comfort can we take for ourselves from his example?
- 4 In 2 Peter 1:12, Peter wrote about "the present truth." What was "present truth" in Peter's time, and what is "present truth" in ours?
- 5 "How surely are the dead beyond death," someone wrote. "Death is what the living carry with them." How should we, as Christians, "carry" death?

## The Miracle Bible

I was packed and ready to leave for the military. My father put his hand on my shoulder and handed me a Bible to take along.

“I’ll be faithful to God,” I promised my father. I knew it wouldn’t be easy, but I was determined to try.

I joined the other recruits, and we started marching toward the basic training camp. The commander made the march as difficult as possible. We had to cross a river on our hands and knees, and when it became very deep, we had to swim with our heavy packs on.

When we crawled out on the other side our bags were soaking wet, but we were given no chance to rest or dry out. We continued marching at a rapid pace. As soon as we arrived at the camp, we were given other exercises to do. It was late at night before we had time to unpack our wet bags.

Pulling out my clothes and other belongings, I wrung river water out of each item and laid them out to dry. Then my eyes fell on the Bible from my father. I groaned, sure it would be ruined from the water. But as I touched it, it felt dry. Surprised, I pulled it out of the bag. It was dry. Everything in my bag was soaked with dirty water—except for the Bible. It was clean and dry. I was reminded that God was with me.

During the rigors of basic training, however, I sometimes forgot the beautiful evidence of God’s presence. I wanted to keep the Sabbath, but it was difficult. I prayed that God would help me find a way.

Then I learned that the military was looking for soldiers to teach military children. I immediately signed up. Thankfully, I was chosen to teach, so I didn’t have to work on Sabbath.

While in the military, I often shared my faith. My roommate talked to me about the Bible; he said he saw something different in me. He accepted my invitation to attend some evangelistic meetings and later gave his life to Jesus.

Another soldier was a Muslim; his father didn’t want him to become a Christian. But he had attended Seventh-day Adventist schools and was ready to take a stand for Christ. We talked a lot about God, and eventually he became an Adventist.

I knew that God was with me. He had kept my Bible dry on the first day of training, and He had made it possible for me to keep the Sabbath and lead others to Him, even while serving in the military.

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## The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Texts:** *2 Peter 1:3, 4, 10, 11*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Understand that everything needed for life and godliness is available through the gift of divine power.

**Feel:** Experience the assurance that comes from knowing the secrets to success in the Christian life that guarantee a rich welcome into Christ's eternal kingdom.

**Do:** Be all the more eager to make his or her calling and election sure by securing the Christian virtues in increasing measure.

► **Learning Outline:**

### I. Know: The Secrets to Success in the Christian Life

**A** What is the relation of God's great and precious promises to escaping the corruption that is in the world through lust?

**B** How do each of the Christian virtues relate to each other in a way that makes them a "ladder" we can climb to become productive in our knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ?

### II. Feel: Finding Assurance of Eternal Life

**A** How does Peter describe the process of finding assurance of achieving eternal life?

**B** Why does Peter call for eagerness to make our calling and election sure?

### III. Do: Obtaining a Knowledge of Jesus Christ

**A** How does Peter describe that which we can do to obtain a knowledge of Him, who called us, as the means of receiving everything needed for life and godliness?

**B** What consequences does Peter say will result from making our calling and election sure?

► **Summary:** Peter identifies the means by which the believer can be assured to make his or her calling and election sure, never fall, and "receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (*2 Pet. 1:10, 11, NIV*).

## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *2 Peter 1:2–4*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** It is possible to become partakers of the divine nature and to escape the corruption that is in the world by way of evil desires. It is possible to achieve assurance of success in the Christian life and to be welcomed into the eternal kingdom of our Lord.

In our passage, Peter tells us how we can accomplish all these goals. We must have an effective and productive knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ—who called us to emulate His holiness (*compare with 1 Pet. 1:15, 16*). After describing the ladder of Christian virtues, Peter says, “For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (*2 Pet. 1:8, NIV*). Through the divine power made available in the precious promises of His Word, God permits us to become partakers of the divine nature and to escape the corrupt natures we have inherited in this world. Thus, He fits us for eternity.

**Just for Teachers:** It is important that all of the proper connections within this passage be made lest class members conclude that it is a matter of working their ways up the ladder of Christian virtues, rung by rung, until they achieve success through their own efforts. While it is true that Peter says, “Make every effort to add . . .” (*2 Pet. 1:5, NIV*), he is not encouraging his readers to attempt to climb the ladder on their own or to conclude that God grants them any merit based on their efforts. He begins the discussion, in verse 3, by reminding the reader, “[God’s] divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life” (*NIV*). Peter adds that, by God’s own glory and goodness, “he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature” and escape the world’s corruption (*2 Pet. 1:4, NIV*). Everything good is a gift from God, but we need to exercise our power of choice by being eager to make our calling and election sure (*1 Pet. 1:10*).

**Opening Activity and Discussion:** Have the class read together 2 Peter 1:2–4. Discuss the divinely appointed elements Peter mentions to achieve spiritual victory.



## ►STEP 2—Explore

### Bible Commentary

#### I. The Centrality of Jesus Christ *(Review 2 Peter 1:1, 2 with your class.)*

As Peter begins his second epistle, he continues his emphasis on the centrality of Jesus Christ that we saw in his first epistle. In the first 15 verses that we will be studying this week, there are six explicit references to Jesus Christ, usually either as Lord or as God, plus many other references to Him through the use of personal pronouns. In verse 1, through a Greek grammatical construction, Jesus is called both our God and Savior. In verses 2, 8, 11, and 14, Jesus is designated as our Lord. In all but verse 2, He is called Jesus Christ, or Jesus the Messiah. In verse 11, He is our Lord and Savior. Clearly, Peter has a very high Christology and wants to communicate this interpretation to his readers. He is proud to bear the name that Jesus gave him, Simon Peter (“the rock”) and to be a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ (*2 Pet. 1:1*).

**Consider This:** Which aspects of Jesus’ person and work are especially important for my life? In what ways can I make Him the center of my daily life?

#### II. The Gifts of God’s Grace *(Review 2 Peter 1:3, 4 with your class.)*

Everything we need for life and godliness has been given to us by God’s divine power through the knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. According to 2 Peter 1:2, grace and peace are ours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. According to verse 8, we need to be kept from being ineffective and unproductive in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Peter also calls us to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It seems that, to Peter, the knowledge of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is key to our successful growth as Christians. God also has given to us very great and precious promises. Through believing in these promises, we can become partakers of the divine nature, escaping the corruption that is in the world by way of the evil desires that the sinful nature produces. The power is in the promise (*Rom. 4:21*).

**Consider This:** In what ways are the grace and power of God through Jesus Christ being manifested in my daily life? How have I experienced the power found in the promises?

### III. The Ladder of Christian Virtues *(Review together 2 Peter 1:5–11.)*

Here Peter identifies the qualities a Christian must acquire and practice in order to be effective and productive in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who remember that they have been cleansed from their sins (*2 Pet. 1:9*) and who are eager to make their calling and election sure (*2 Pet. 1:10*) will develop these traits in increasing measure (*2 Pet. 1:8*). Then they can be assured that they will never fall (*2 Pet. 1:10*) and that they “will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (*2 Pet. 1:11, NIV*). Invite the class to spend some time reviewing these virtues. Discuss the inter-relationship between them that forms a “ladder” of sorts, leading to upward growth and progress.

**Consider This:** How many virtues in Peter’s list are evident in my daily life? In what ways am I growing or stagnating?

#### Discussion Questions:

❶ How does Peter’s catalog of virtues compare with Paul’s list of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22, 23? In what ways can we exemplify these qualities of growing Christians?

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❷ What does Peter mean by “the tent of this body” (*2 Pet. 1:13, NIV*)? Compare 2 Corinthians 5:1–4. What does this text tell us about his view of the nature of humanity?

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### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Some Seventh-day Adventists believe that at the end of time there will be a group of believers who will achieve a level of perfection that is absolute. Others believe that the perfection to be achieved is relative, speaking of maturity in faith and practice rather than of absolute perfection. Ellen G. White says, regarding Christ’s injunction in Matthew 5:48 to be perfect, “We may be as perfect in our sphere as God is in His sphere.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 455. This statement suggests relative or moral character perfection (see *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 330, 331). Nevertheless, it would be wise not to get sidetracked. There

is nothing in 2 Peter 1:8–11 that speaks of absolute perfection; only of victory and assurance. Maintain the focus of the text.

### Thought Questions:

❶ What biblical promises have I found to be powerful aids in dealing with the corruption that is in the world by way of evil desires?

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❷ Where do I find myself on the ladder of Christian virtues? In what ways am I still growing?

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**Activity:** Have the class read together 2 Peter 1:8–11. Discuss the implications (as identified in 2 Peter 1:8, 9) of having the qualities in 2 Peter 1:5–7 versus not having them. Why would it be important to demonstrate an eagerness to make one’s calling and election sure?

## ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** There is a fine balance between assurance and self-confidence in one’s salvation. Ellen G. White warns, “Those who accept Christ, and in their first confidence say, I am saved, are in danger of trusting to themselves. They lose sight of their own weakness and their constant need of divine strength. They are unprepared for Satan’s devices, and under temptation many, like Peter, fall into the very depths of sin. We are admonished, ‘Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.’ 1 Cor. 10:12. Our only safety is in constant distrust of self, and dependence on Christ.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 155.

**Activity:** Take a poll of the class by secret ballot (so as to maintain confidentiality) in order to determine (1) how many have assurance of salvation and (2) what they understand to be the basis for their assurance (or lack of assurance). Discuss the results with the class.

# Prophecy *and* Scripture



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Isa. 53:1–12; Dan. 7:13, 14; 2 Pet. 1:16–20; Matt. 17:1–6; 2 Tim. 3:15–17.*

**Memory Text:** “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:19).

As we continue to study the letters of Peter, one point should stand out: how confident and how certain Peter is in what he is writing. We can see the same with Paul: clear and firm conviction about what they are proclaiming in regard to Jesus Christ and the Cross.

In the texts for this week, we will see more of this certainty in Peter. And he even tells us why he has such certainty. We don't believe, he said, “cunningly devised fables” (2 Pet. 1:16)—such as those that comprised the pagan religions of their time. Instead, Peter was sure of what he believed in, for two reasons.

First, he was an eyewitness to “our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:8). But second, and perhaps even more important (because almost everyone else will not be an eyewitness), is the “sure word of prophecy” (2 Pet. 1:19). Peter again goes back to the Bible, pointing to the Scriptures for the certain affirmation of Jesus, especially the prophetic sections that talked about Him. No doubt these are some of the same sections that Jesus referred to regarding Himself (*Matt. 26:54, Luke 24:27*). So if Jesus and Peter took the Bible this seriously, how dare we do otherwise ourselves?

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 3.

## Jesus in the Old Testament

All through his epistles, Peter writes with a sense of certainty. He knows *what* he is talking about because he knows *whom* he is talking about. And one reason is that he knows that Jesus was the One to whom the Old Testament prophets pointed. It was Peter's trust in the Written Word that helped him know the Word "made flesh" (*John 1:14*).

In 1 Peter 1:10–12, Peter points his readers to the Hebrew Bible, to the prophets of old, and what they taught about Jesus. According to Peter, the Holy Spirit revealed in the Old Testament two crucial truths about Jesus: the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories that would follow (*1 Pet. 1:11*). These two strands can be found throughout the Hebrew Bible.

**What** do these texts together teach about what the Old Testament predicted concerning Jesus? *Psalm 22; Isa. 53:1–12; Zech. 12:10; 13:7; Jer. 33:14, 15; Dan. 7:13, 14.*

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In 1 Peter 1:10–12, Peter assures his readers that they occupy a very special place in salvation history. To them had been revealed much more than what was revealed to the prophets of old. The prophets indeed spoke to their own times, but crucial parts of their messages would not be fulfilled until the coming of Christ.

Some of what the prophets had predicted had come true only in the time in which Peter's readers were then living. These readers were able to hear from those "who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven," truths that even the angels desired to know (*1 Pet. 1:12, NKJV*). Having had the gospel preached to them, the people knew in much more detail than did the prophets of old the reality and nature of the Redeemer's suffering and humiliation. Of course, they will have to wait, as will we, for "the glories that would follow" (*1 Pet. 1:11, NKJV*). With the first part of those prophecies fulfilled, we can be certain about the last part, as well.

**What biblical promises have you seen fulfilled in your life? Which ones are you still waiting for, what do they mean to you, and how can you learn to hold on to them, no matter what?**

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## Eyewitnesses of Majesty

**Read 2 Peter 1:16–18.** What other evidence does Peter say he has for his faith in Jesus?

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Besides the prophetic word, Peter was an eyewitness to many of the things that he preached about. Christianity, he said, is not founded on “cunningly devised fables” (*2 Pet. 1:16, NKJV*), but on real events that happened in history—events that he himself had witnessed.

In the Gospels, Peter was there for many of the pivotal events in the life and ministry of Jesus. He was there for the preaching, the teaching, and the miracles. From the early miracle of the fish (*Luke 5:4–6*) to seeing Jesus in Galilee after His resurrection (*John 21:15*), Peter was an eyewitness to so much of what happened.

**In 2 Peter 1:17, 18, what event did Peter especially focus on regarding what he had personally seen? What was the special significance of that event?**

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Peter highlights one specific eyewitness event: the transfiguration of Jesus. Jesus had taken Peter, James, and John with Him to the top of a mountain in order to pray (*Luke 9:28*). While there with them He became transformed before their eyes. His face shone, and His clothes became dazzling white (*Matt. 17:2, Luke 9:29*). He was joined by Moses and Elijah, and a voice from heaven said, “‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’ ” (*Matt. 17:5, NKJV*).

Peter had seen a lot in his time with Jesus; yet, this incident stands out. It reveals Jesus to be the Son of God, that His time on earth was spent according to God’s plan, and that He had a very special relationship with the Father. Even with all that Peter had seen or would see, this event—which included “this voice which came from heaven” (*2 Pet. 1:18*)—was the one that he focused on in this letter.

**Think about what event or events have made a deep and lasting impression on your spiritual life and faith. What was it, how did it impact you, and what does it still mean to you today? Why do you think it had the impact that it did? Share your answers in class on Sabbath.**

## The Morning Star in Our Hearts

**“And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Pet. 1:19, NKJV).**

**Read** this text carefully. What is Peter saying that is so important to us, even today?

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Here, as we can see in many places in the Bible (*Gen. 1:4, John 1:5, Isa. 5:20, Eph. 5:8*), a division is made between light and darkness. For Peter the Word of God shone like a light in a “dark” place (some translate the word *dark* as “squalid,” “dirty,” as well). That’s why he’s so clear that we need to take “heed” to that light, to follow it until “the day dawns and the morning star rises in [our] hearts.” We are fallen beings, living in a fallen and dark world. We need the supernatural power of God to lead us out of this darkness and to the light, and that light is Jesus.

Peter is pointing his readers to a goal. Some believe that the expression “until the day dawns” refers to the second coming of Jesus. Though that’s certainly our ultimate hope, the idea of the “morning star” rising in your hearts sounds more immediate and more personal. The “morning star” refers to Jesus (*Rev. 2:28, 22:16*). His rising in their hearts seems to be about knowing Jesus, fully taking hold of Him and experiencing the reality of the living Christ in their own individual lives. Jesus shouldn’t be just a doctrinal truth; He should be the center of our existence and source of our hope and faith. So, Peter is establishing a clear link between studying the Word of God and having a saving relationship with Jesus, the “morning star.”

And, of course, with the light shining in us, we will spread it to others. “The whole earth is to be illuminated with the glory of God’s truth. The light is to shine to all lands and all peoples. And it is from those who have received the light that it is to shine forth. The day-star has risen upon us, and we are to flash its light upon the pathway of those in darkness.”—Ellen G. White, *Christian Experience and Teachings of Ellen G. White*, p. 220.

**How does your own study of the Word help you to come to know Jesus better?**

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## The More Sure Word of Prophecy

**Read 2** Peter 1:19–21. To what prophecies is Peter referring? What does he mean when he says that *no* prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation?

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In stressing that Christianity is not based on cunningly devised fables (2 Pet. 1:16), Peter offers up two lines of evidence: first, eyewitnesses (2 Pet. 1:16–18); second, the prophecies of Scripture (2 Pet. 1:19–21), an argument he used earlier (1 Pet. 1:10–12).

Peter also states, “No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation” (2 Pet. 1:20, *NKJV*). In saying this, Peter is not forbidding us to study Scripture for ourselves. That would be very far from the thoughts of the one who said, in 1 Peter 1:13, to “gird up the loins of your mind” (*KJV*) or “prepare your minds for action” (*NRSV*). Nor would it be said by one who commended the prophets of old for their diligent searching after the meaning of the prophecies that they had been given (1 Pet. 1:10).

Then what did Peter mean? The New Testament church progressed together and studied together. Christians were part of a larger body (1 Cor. 12:12–14). And Peter here was warning against the kind of study in which one rejects any insight from the community of believers. In interacting with others we can grow together as a community. The Spirit works with the community and the individuals in it. Insights can be shared, refined, and deepened. But the one who works alone, refusing input from others, is likely to come to wrong interpretations, especially with something such as prophecy.

In the next verses we find a good reason for Peter to make this observation. He is writing to Christians who have among them false prophets and false teachers (2 Pet. 2:1). Peter is urging them to submit their interpretation of Scripture to the leading of the church as a whole. How many people have drifted off into fanaticism and error because they refused to heed the counsel of a Spirit-led community of believers? It was a danger back then, and it remains one today.

**Why is it so important to be open to the counsel and advice of the church at large? At the same time, what are the limits on how far we should go in submitting to others?**

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## The Word in Our Lives

As we have seen, Peter placed great emphasis on the Holy Scriptures. Second Peter 1:19–21 is a powerful affirmation of the importance of the Bible to our Christian experience and to the divine inspiration of the Scriptures. His point is clear in 2 Peter 1:21. The Bible is not the product of human will, human devising, like other books. It is a book produced through the power of the Holy Spirit working through “holy men of God.”

**Read 2 Timothy 3:15–17. How do these texts help us to understand the role of Scripture in our lives? How do they enforce the truth of 2 Peter 1:19–21?**

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After warning Timothy about the dangers facing him and the church, Paul gives a brief outline of the importance of Scripture. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16).

Let’s look at these three points.

*Doctrine:* Doctrines are the teachings of the church. They express the beliefs of the community on various biblical topics deemed important in the Word of God. Ideally, each doctrine should be Christ-centered, and each should teach us something that helps us know how to live in accordance with the “perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2, ASV).

*Guidance:* Paul tells Timothy that Scripture is profitable for “reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). Peter makes a similar point when he says that the prophecy in Scripture is like a lamp that is shining in a dark place (2 Pet. 1:19). In other words, Scripture provides guidance in how we should live and in what is right and wrong conduct. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Scripture is nothing less than the revealed will of God.

*“Wise unto salvation”:* When he says that Scripture makes us “wise unto salvation” (2 Tim. 3:15), Paul is pointing out that Scripture points us to Jesus. Salvation is built on the belief that Jesus has died for our sins.

Doctrine, moral guidance, the knowledge of salvation: no wonder the Word of God is like “a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Pet. 1:19, NKJV).

**Further Thought:** “It is the first and highest duty of every rational being to learn from the Scriptures what is truth, and then to walk in the light and encourage others to follow his example. We should day by day study the Bible diligently, weighing every thought and comparing scripture with scripture. With divine help we are to form our opinions for ourselves as we are to answer for ourselves before God.

“The truths most plainly revealed in the Bible have been involved in doubt and darkness by learned men, who, with a pretense of great wisdom, teach that the Scriptures have a mystical, a secret, spiritual meaning not apparent in the language employed. These men are false teachers. It was to such a class that Jesus declared: ‘Ye know not the Scriptures, neither the power of God.’ Mark 12:24. The language of the Bible should be explained according to its obvious meaning, unless a symbol or figure is employed. Christ has given the promise: ‘If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine.’ John 7:17. If men would but take the Bible as it reads, if there were no false teachers to mislead and confuse their minds, a work would be accomplished that would make angels glad and that would bring into the fold of Christ thousands upon thousands who are now wandering in error.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 598, 599.

## Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What other crucial principles are involved in seeking to come to a clear understanding of Scripture?
- ❷ Martin Luther wrote that “Scripture is its own light.” By that he meant that there’s an underlying unity in the Bible and that one part can be used to help us to understand other parts. What are some examples of this principle that you can find?
- ❸ In class, go over your answer to Monday’s question about the event or events that greatly impacted your Christian experience. What do the events have in common, if anything? What can you learn from one another’s experiences?
- ❹ If someone were to ask you how studying the Bible can deepen your walk with the Lord, what would you answer? What principles have you learned from your own experience of seeking to know the Lord Jesus through study of His Written Word?

## Putting God in the Picture

As a professional photographer, I take photographs and videos of weddings and other important occasions. I also film documentaries for television and photograph sporting events.

When I first became a Seventh-day Adventist, I wondered how I would ever keep the Sabbath. Most of the events that I covered fell on Sabbath, and I had to work these events in order to keep my job. I had a family to support; so, I decided to go to church on Sabbaths when I didn't have work, but when I had an assignment, I worked.

However, I had no peace about working on the Sabbath. And it seemed that no matter how hard I worked I couldn't get ahead. Someone in my family would get sick, or we would have other unexpected expenses. I asked the pastors at church to pray for us.

Then God stepped in. The company I was working for was bought by another company, and I lost my job. Almost immediately people began calling me to work as a freelancer. I realized that I could have my own business.

Then I heard a sermon about being faithful to God's principles no matter what. That sermon pricked my conscience. I knew that God was nudging me to be more faithful to Him. I decided that I wouldn't take any assignments on the Sabbath. I knew it would be difficult, because most social events occur on the weekends. But I was determined to trust God to supply our needs.

It isn't always easy. Sometimes we've had to ask the landlord for extra time to pay the rent, or think of new ways to make our money stretch. But God is with us.

Just when our financial obligations seemed to overwhelm us, I met a former client on the street. He had owed me money for a long time. We chatted for a few minutes, but neither of us said anything about the money. Then as we prepared to part, he handed me the money he had owed me for years. Several months later, another former client paid me money I had long forgotten and never expected to see.

I don't earn as much as I did when I worked on Sabbath, but God is blessing in other ways. My children have fewer sicknesses, and we have fewer unexpected bills. I know that we have no need to fear for the future. I try to encourage others to be faithful, and I assure them that God will always provide a way.

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## *The Lesson in Brief*

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► **Key Text:** *2 Peter 1:16–21*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Acknowledge that Scripture is God’s authoritative source for knowledge of God’s will and for our salvation through Jesus Christ.

**Feel:** Find the objective revelation of Christ in Scripture to provide a better source of faith and hope than any personal, subjective experience that he or she may have.

**Do:** Give priority to the place of Scripture in the life, as he or she would to a light shining in a dark place.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: A More Reliable Prophetic Word**

**A** Peter described the prophetic Word as being more reliable than what?

**B** What makes the prophetic Word so objective and reliable, like a light in the dark?

**II. Feel: The Risks of Subjective Experiences**

**A** How did Peter express his confidence in his own personal experience with Jesus?

**B** What are the dangers in relying on our own personal sensory experiences?

**III. Do: Trust God and His Word.**

**A** Why should we trust God’s Word more than our own subjective experiences?

**B** What does Peter say that we must understand “above all”? What is the nature of the process of revelation and inspiration described in verse 21?

► **Summary:** Peter cites his own sensory experiences with Jesus as a reliable basis for his accounts of Jesus’ power and coming. But he then declares that God’s prophetic Word is more certain than are these subjective personal experiences, because it has its origin in the Holy Spirit.

## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *2 Peter 1:20, 21*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** As humans, we tend to place confidence in our experiences and in the evidence of our senses. This tendency we deem to be dependable, even rational and scientific. Observation is the basis for empirical science. Yet, we can be fooled by our senses. After appealing to the value of sensory experience as evidence for the truth of his gospel message, Peter steps up the test for truth by declaring that there is a more reliable basis for determining reality and truth, namely, the prophetic Word of God. It has its origin not in the will of humans but in the moving of the Holy Spirit on the minds of His agents.

**Just for Teachers:** We live in a very scientific age; yet cynicism abounds regarding the possibility for determining truth by objective methods. The means by which truth was supposed to be determined in the modern period was the empirical method—eliminating uncontrolled variables, such as the supernatural—so that all aspects of a matter could be accounted for under strict testing conditions with many observers over time in order to produce an assured result. In many areas, including religion, no consensus was produced over an extended period of time, so cynicism developed regarding the possibility of any assured result from this method. Consequently, postmodernism came in, denying any absolute truth or any metanarratives that fully explained something. Personal experience became the basis for truth, with all truth being subjective and relative to one's experience. How does Peter's message address this tension?

**Opening Activity and Discussion:** Ask the class to read together 2 Peter 1:16–18 and Matthew 16:27–17:8. Discuss the evidences Peter cites for the veracity of his claims regarding Jesus. Why was he justified in citing his own experience as evidence that he was not cleverly inventing stories? How could Peter distinguish between this experience and something he may have merely imagined?

### ►STEP 2—Explore

**Bible Text:** *2 Peter 1:16*

**Just for Teachers:** Peter directly counters the skepticism regarding the genuineness and authority of his teaching, not only in his own day but also in ours. He has not been sharing with believers cleverly invented stories; he has been sharing his own real-life experiences. One might expect that this claim would authenticate the genuineness of his testimony as the author of the letter; however, for skeptics it has had just the opposite effect. They argue that the author tries too hard to prove who he is. They see this attempt as evidence that Peter is not the author but, rather, that the letter was written by someone else. Those skeptical of Peter's authorship fail to see themselves in 2 Peter 3:3 as scoffers who are following their own evil desires and denying the truth of God's Word. How are we often like these skeptics, failing to see the applicability of Scripture to our own situations?

## Bible Commentary

### I. An Even More Reliable Testimony (*Review 2 Peter 1:19 with your class.*)

Despite the reliability of his eyewitness testimony, Peter now argues for a still more reliable testimony, one that cannot fail. The evidence presented to our senses can lead us astray, as it sometimes does. Scripture repeatedly warns against allowing our senses to deceive us (*Matt. 7:15; 24:24; 2 Cor. 11:13, 14; 2 Thess. 2:9, 10; Rev. 13:13, 14*).

Many illusionists make their livings doing tricks that fool the mind, but Satan is the master sorcerer. He works his deceptive signs and wonders, usually through individuals who have subscribed to his sophistries. Peter, conscious of the dangers of following the evidence of our senses, recommends a safer source for learning truth. God's Word is the only source of truth that is entirely safe and reliable. We "will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises" in our hearts (*2 Pet. 1:19, NIV*).

**Consider This:** "The day" is a reference to the anticipated "day of the Lord" (*2 Pet. 3:10, NIV*) or "the day of God" (*2 Pet. 3:12*), also called "the day of judgment" (*2 Pet. 2:9, 3:7*) and "the day of visitation" (*1 Pet. 2:12, NKJV*). It is the Second Coming. "The morning star" is a reference to Jesus Himself (*NIV*). He declares in Revelation 22:16, "I am . . . the bright Morning Star" (*NIV*). The "morning star" derives its name from being the brightest "star" in the morning sky, the last light of the night to fade as the day dawns. Astronomers identify the planet Venus as the morning star, but Jesus takes this title to Himself. The Morning Star will fully rise in our hearts when "the day dawns." What are we doing to prepare for the rise of the true Morning Star in our hearts?

## II. The Origin of the Prophetic Word (*Review together 2 Peter 1:20, 21.*)

Peter begins 2 Peter 1:20 with the words, “Above all, you must understand . . .” (*NIV*). There is nothing that his readers need to understand more clearly than the basis for confidence in the prophetic Word of God. It did not originate in the human will. Rather, “prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (*2 Pet. 1:21, NIV*). Peter argues here for an incarnational revelation in which the divine message was entrusted to human agents as a means of revealing God’s thoughts through the work of the Holy Spirit. The initiative and message are God’s; He is responsible for the content and its preservation.

Regarding the human element in Scripture, Ellen G. White explains, “The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God’s mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God’s penmen, not His pen.”—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 21. She adds this clarification: “It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man’s words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God.”—Page 21.

**Consider This:** How confident can we be of the divine element in the production of the message of Scripture?

### Discussion Questions:

❶ What do we learn from our experiences with God and His promises? In what ways do they confirm our trust in Him? Why can we—and indeed, must we—always trust God over our senses?

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❷ What is it about the prophetic Word that makes it so trustworthy? How does the record of the fulfillment of prophecy help to build our confidence in the reliability of God’s Word?

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### ►STEP 3—Apply

#### Thought Questions:

❶ In what ways might we sometimes behave as though we don't trust the record of Scripture? How can we counter this temptation?

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❷ If no prophecy of Scripture came about by a prophet's own interpretation, what would be a safe methodology for deriving God's intended meaning from Scripture?

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**Activity:** Have the class read together 2 Timothy 3:14–16. Discuss the basis for Timothy's understanding of Scripture, according to Paul, and the value of a correct understanding of Scripture for all believers.

### ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** We tend to speak glibly about the importance of belief in salvation. But we need more than just an intellectual belief or assent to certain truths or realities. James 2:19 tells us that even the demons believe in God but that belief does not save them. Belief, James says, needs to be accompanied by commensurate actions (*James 2:14–17*). A better term than “belief” is “trust.” Trust implies not only an intellectual acceptance of certain realities but also a readiness to commit to action based on the conviction that God knows what is best. He has revealed His will for our lives in His Word, and He will empower us to accomplish His will as we commit ourselves to it.

**Activity:** Have the class draw up a list of biblical prophecies that have been fulfilled and the evidences of their fulfillment. Discuss the confidence in Scripture that we can have—and can share with others—as a result of seeing the evidence that God knows all things, including the distant future, and that we can trust Him and His plan for our lives.



# False Teachers




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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** 2 Pet. 2:1–22, John 8:34–36, Matt. 12:43–45, Jude 4–19, Gen. 18:16–33.

**Memory Text:** “They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption; for people are slaves to whatever masters them” (2 Peter 2:19, NRSV).

In his first epistle, Peter, with great pastoral concern, sought to encourage readers in regard to the perils of persecution. Though we don't know exactly what form of persecution he was specifically addressing, we do know that the church would face terrible trials as the pagan Roman Empire sought to extinguish the growing movement of people called “Christians.”

Satan launched a two-pronged attack. Certainly, persecution from the outside—that is, brute force and violence—was a powerful tool. But the church faced another threat, one perhaps even more dangerous than outside persecution. And that was the threat from inside. Just as the Jewish nation in the past had to deal with false prophets, the follower of Jesus in Peter's day had to deal with false teachers who would “secretly introduce destructive heresies” (2 Pet. 2:1, NIV) into the church itself. And, even worse, Peter warned that many would follow these “destructive ways” (2 Pet. 2:2, NKJV).

What were some of these teachings that Peter was warning about? How did Peter react to them, and what lessons can we take from his warnings for ourselves today, as we also face threats from within?

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 10.

## False Prophets and Teachers

It's sometimes easy to idealize the early church, to think of it as a time of great peace and harmony among the earliest believers in Jesus.

That would be a mistake. Even from the days of Jesus the church faced struggles, often from within (think of Judas). As the New Testament epistles show, many of the problems came from false teachings in their midst. The early church struggled, not just with persecution from the outside but from problems within, as well. In this letter Peter deals with some of those internal challenges. What are they? “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber” (2 *Pet.* 2:1–3, *NKJV*). It hardly sounds like a time of great peace and internal harmony among the brothers and sisters.

**Read** 2 Peter 2:1–3, 10–22. What is Peter warning about here? What are some of the false things that were being promoted in the churches?

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Second Peter 2:1 most likely reveals the reason the Lord inspired Peter to write the letter. He was warning them that just as there had been false prophets in the past, there will be false teachers in the future. Peter outlines quite a litany of charges against these teachers, everything from “destructive heresies” (2 *Pet.* 2:1, *NKJV*) to leading the unwary into bondage (2 *Pet.* 2:19) and a host of other errors, as well. From what he wrote, we can see that these were indeed very dangerous teachings, which explains why he reacted so strongly against them. Peter knew nothing of the idea that doctrine doesn’t matter.

**Look at how strongly Peter reacts to these false teachings. What should this tell us about how important truth is? How can we protect ourselves against any and all attempts to bring false doctrine into the church?**

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## Freedom in Christ?

“For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of the flesh, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error” (2 Pet. 2:18, NIV).

**What** is Peter warning about in this verse? What does he say in 2 Peter 2:19 that helps explain his concern? What is the importance of the word *freedom* (NIV) or *liberty* (NKJV) in verse 19?

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In the strongest possible language, Peter was giving his readers a warning against the dangers of false teachers. In 2 Peter 2:18–21 he warned that these false teachers, while promising liberty and freedom, would actually lead people into bondage.

What a complete perversion of the gospel! Freedom in Christ should mean freedom from the slavery of sin (Rom. 6:4–6). Any concept of freedom in Christ that leaves a person in the bondage of sin is the kind of error that Peter is warning about. Though scholars have debated the precise heresy that he was dealing with here, it’s clearly linked to the whole question of sin and one’s being a slave to it.

**Read** John 8:34–36. How do Christ’s words here help us to understand what Peter is saying?

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Whatever these false teachers were presenting, they were leading their victims—people who had recently found the Lord Jesus—back to their old sinful way of life. It’s easy to imagine some kind of cheap grace gospel that downplayed the need for purity and holiness, something that caused them to be caught up again in the very “corruption” (2 Pet. 2:19) of the world they had just escaped from. No wonder Peter spoke so sharply and strongly against these teachings and warned about what the result of following them would be.

**What do you understand freedom in Christ to be? From what has Christ freed you?**

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## A Dog Returns to Its Vomit

**Read** 2 Peter 2:17–22 and Matthew 12:43–45. What are the dangers when a convert to Christianity returns to his or her former life-style?

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Peter was particularly concerned about the fate of those whom the false teachers entice back into their former sins (2 Pet. 2:18). The false teachers promise freedom, but as Peter points out, the freedom that they promise is radically different from the kind of freedom that Jesus promised those who followed Him.

Look at the powerful warning Peter gave. It would have been better never to have “known the way of righteousness” (2 Pet. 2:21) than to have known it and then turned back to their old ways.

Of course, this doesn’t mean their case is hopeless. We all know stories of those who have turned away from the Lord and later have come back. And we know that the Lord is very glad when they do and happy to take them back. (See Luke 15:11–32.) It means only that turning away is a very dangerous course to take, nor is it a pleasant one either. A dog returning to its own vomit is a crude and harsh way to describe it, but Peter makes his point with that image.

Perhaps the echo of the words of Jesus in 2 Peter 2:20 is intentional (see Matt. 12:45, Luke 11:26). Jesus tells the parable of a man who has been freed from an unclean spirit. The spirit wanders without a place of his own, and then returns to see “‘my house from which I came’” (Matt. 12:44, NKJV). He arrives and finds it empty and put in order. He then moves back in, but he brings with him several other spirits more wicked than he is. As Jesus says, “‘The last state of that man is worse than the first’ ” (Matt. 12:45, NKJV). The danger Jesus illustrates and Peter describes is real. The new believer needs to ensure that the things of the Spirit replace the things that used to dominate his or her life. If involvement in church and the sharing of the new faith do not replace the earlier secular activities, it is too easy to revert to one’s old ways.

**What are ways we as a church family can better nurture and disciple all our members, especially newer ones?**

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## Peter and Jude

Many people have observed that Jude 4–19 largely repeats the message of 2 Peter 2:1–3:7. Whenever Scripture repeats a message, we should be aware that God wants to convey something important. In these similar passages, Peter and Jude take great lengths to notify us of an important truth: God is in control of the destinies of the wicked. Both Peter and Jude leave us with no doubt that God is closely monitoring evil. Whether unrighteous humanity or the fallen angels, God has taken special note of their evil and has planned their punishment on the day of judgment (*2 Pet. 2:9, 17; Jude 6*).

**Read 2 Peter 2:1–3:7 and Jude 4–19. What examples of God’s earlier vengeance do Peter and Jude give to punctuate the fact that God means business in dealing with sin?**

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Peter and Jude record three examples of God’s vengeance in the past. They include the destruction of the antediluvian world by the Flood, the incineration of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the chaining of angelic beings for destruction (*2 Pet. 2:4–6; 3:7; Jude 6, 7*). All of these episodes are laced with a lingering sense of finality. Though Scripture speaks a great deal about God’s mercy and grace, God’s justice also plays an important role in the final destruction of sin.

What were the sins that engendered such severe punishment? They include introducing destructive heresies; despising authority; enslavement to whatever has mastered them; perverting the grace of God into a license for immorality; denying Jesus Christ as the only Sovereign and Lord; polluting their own bodies; speaking empty, boastful words; and slandering (*2 Pet. 2:1, 10, 19; Jude 4; Jude 8; 2 Pet. 2:18; Jude 10, NIV*).

Interestingly, these descriptions do not include violent acts and other wicked atrocities that often outrage us. Instead, they describe more subtle sins that have one commonality. They are sins that are sometimes excused within the church community itself. This fact should awaken us to the great need for sincere repentance and reformation in the church.

**Read 2 Peter 2:12 and Jude 10. Here Peter and Jude describe those who are facing destruction as having degraded into “unreasoning” (*2 Pet. 2:12, NIV*) or “irrational” animals (*Jude 10, NIV*) ruled by instinct. How does that description compare to how God originally created humanity, and how can you prevent that from happening in your life?**

## More Old Testament Lessons

**Read** 2 Peter 2:6–16. What other examples does Peter use to give his warning about what wickedness will lead to?

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The first substantive reference to Sodom in the Bible is Genesis 13:12, 13. Lot and Abraham decided to separate for “financial” reasons. Lot chose the Jordan Valley and “pitched his tent toward Sodom” (*Gen. 13:12*). The Bible then comments, “Now the people of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the LORD” (*Gen. 13:13, NRSV*). Later, when God warned Abraham that He was planning to destroy Sodom, Abraham negotiated an agreement that God would not destroy it if ten righteous people were found there (*Gen. 18:16–33*). The unlikelihood of finding even ten righteous people in Sodom was amply demonstrated by what happened to the messengers sent to visit Lot. The city was duly destroyed; only Lot and his two daughters escaped (*Gen. 19:12–25*).

Peter derives two lessons from this story. First, the two cities provide an example of the punishment coming to the ungodly (*2 Pet. 2:6*). Second, it shows that the Lord knows how to rescue the righteous from trial (*2 Pet. 2:7–9*). Peter then notes some of the characteristics of those who were destroyed at Sodom and Gomorrah: they indulge their flesh in depraved lust, despise authority, are bold and willful, and do not hesitate to slander the angels (*2 Pet. 2:10, 11*). These characteristics have similarities to how Peter describes the false teachers and their followers.

The story of Balaam is found in Numbers 22:1–24:25. He had been hired by Balak, king of Moab, to curse the Israelites. At first reluctant, he was eventually persuaded to take on this task by the offer of a larger sum of money (*Num. 22:7–21*). On his way he was confronted by an “angel of the LORD” and was saved from death only when his donkey turned aside. Balaam then beat his donkey and realized his mistake only when his eyes were opened and he saw the “angel of the LORD” himself (*Num. 22:22–35*). In the end, Balaam ended up blessing Israel (*Num. 23:4–24:24*). Peter used Balaam as an example of those enticed by adultery and greed (*2 Pet. 2:14, 15*). Such people are like Balaam. They have left the path that they should follow.

**Think about all that we have been given, both in the Bible and in the writings of Ellen G. White. Thus, why can we as Seventh-day Adventists never say that we haven’t been warned?**

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**Further Thought:** So often we hear Christians talk about “freedom in Christ.” And, of course, this is a valid concept. To be free from the condemnation of the law and to have assurance of salvation because of what Christ has done for us and not from our own works is indeed to be free. The story of Martin Luther and the bondage from which he suffered before he understood grace is a great example of what this freedom can mean. However, as we saw in Peter, the wonderful truth can be twisted. “The great truth of our entire dependence upon Christ for salvation lies close to the error of presumption. Freedom in Christ is by thousands mistaken for lawlessness; and because Christ came to release us from the condemnation of the law, many declare that the law itself is done away, and that those who keep it are fallen from grace. And thus, as truth and error appear so near akin, minds that are not guided by the Holy Spirit will be led to accept the error and, in so doing, place themselves under the power of Satan’s deceptions. In thus leading people to receive error for truth, Satan is working to secure the homage of the Protestant world.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ Triumphant*, p. 324.

## Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Meditate on 2 Peter 2:19 and the other things Peter says about the results of the false teaching. Why must we be sure to learn for ourselves the crucial truths we believe? How important is it that we all agree exactly on what we should believe? When does it become “dangerous” to think ideas that are different from the rest of our fellow believers?
- ❷ Look at some of the strong language of Peter in regard to the whole question of punishment and judgment: “bring upon themselves swift destruction” (2 Pet. 2:1); “shall utterly perish in their own corruption” (2 Pet. 2:12); “to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished” (2 Pet. 2:9); “and their destruction does not slumber” (2 Pet. 2:3, NKJV). What should these texts tell us about not only the reality of judgment but about how strongly God condemns those who will lead His people into error?
- ❸ What do you think it means when those who talk about “freedom in Christ” generally do so, not in the context of the law in general (though some do) but in the context of keeping the fourth commandment, the Sabbath commandment? How does this argument help us to see another way that the idea of “freedom in Christ” can be twisted?

## Mother of Many: Part 1

I'm a Bible worker, and my heart is in evangelism. One day God impressed me to work with an unusual group of people.

On my way to work, I paused at the gate to the church office and glanced at the boys standing nearby. I knew that most of them were homeless, either by choice or by circumstances they couldn't control. Some had run away from abusive homes or from unending poverty. I wondered if they missed their mothers. I turned and walked nervously over to them.

"Hello," I greeted them with a smile.

They looked at me strangely, wondering what I was going to do next.

I knew that many of these boys were addicted to drugs and alcohol. And I was sure that they all were hungry. They needed a family, at least a mother, to look out for them and teach them right from wrong. God had impressed me to get to know these young boys and share His love with them. "I'm your mother," I said bravely. "I'd like to get to know you."

But the boys were shy, and I was nervous. I knew that, even though they were young, they far outnumbered me and could easily steal my bag or hurt me if they wanted to. But I kept smiling and talking. I talked to them for a few minutes until we all felt more at ease. Then I invited them to come and sit under a tree with me so we could talk some more.

The boys hesitated, but eventually they came and sat down. I told them a little about myself; then, I told them how God loves each one of them. They warmed up to me and began to tell me a little bit about themselves. I invited the boys to return the following week.

The next Monday I brought food with me. I knew that boys are always hungry, especially homeless boys who probably hadn't had a home-cooked meal for a very long time. Most of them survived on handouts they received from begging and leftovers from the bakeries.

I made foo-foo (a starchy paste made from potato, plantain, or cassava) and some soup. When the boys arrived, they smelled the food, and I could see the smiles on their faces. They ate hungrily, and again we talked. Some boys even trusted me enough to tell me that foo-foo wasn't one of their favorite foods and asked if I could make something different. I tried to vary the food each week to please everyone's taste at least sometimes. And the boys loved it.

*To be continued in next week's Inside Story.*



## *The Lesson in Brief*

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► **Key Text:** 2 Peter 2:1–3

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Recognize that while we have eyewitness testimonies and God’s prophetic Word, false teachers will arise, introducing destructive heresies based on fabricated messages.

**Feel:** Fear the destruction that these false teachers are bringing upon themselves.

**Do:** Be alert to distinguish the true from the false.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: Satan’s Strategy Against Truth**

**A** For every truth there is a counterfeit. In our day, what are the counterfeits for the key truths of God’s Word?

**B** What are the signs by which we can recognize the characteristics of the deceivers?

**II. Feel: God’s Activity in the Face of Evil**

**A** What earlier examples does Peter cite to show how greed and lust lead to destruction?

**B** What examples does he cite to show how God is able to rescue the godly?

**III. Do: Know Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.**

**A** How can we escape the corruption of the world by knowing Jesus Christ?

**B** How can we avoid being deceived, entangled in sin, and overcome by it?

► **Summary:** In a world characterized by sin, lust, greed, deception, and detestation of authority, God knows how to rescue the godly from these temptations and to hold the ungodly under condemnation for the day of judgment. Our salvation is in knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *2 Peter 2:1–3, 20, 21*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Just as true prophets exist (*2 Pet. 1:21*), false prophets and false teachers abound in every age (*2 Pet. 2:1*). For every truth there is a counterfeit. Those who have known the Lord Jesus Christ but have become entangled again by the corruption of the world are worse off than if they had never known the way of righteousness (*2 Pet. 2:20*). The false teachers who Peter warns against have been believers, but for material gain they have left the straight way (*2 Pet. 2:3, 15*) and introduced destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who redeemed them (*2 Pet. 2:1*). Their judgment is certain (*2 Pet. 2:3, 9, 10, 12*). Yet the Lord knows how to deliver the godly from these temptations (*2 Pet. 2:9*), and Peter appeals to his readers to shun the deceptions offered by these false teachers.

**Just for Teachers:** There is a very close relationship between *2 Peter 2:1–3:3* and *Jude 3–19*. The standard edition of the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* has indicated a few of the parallels between these two passages. There are many more. It would be helpful to study these parallels in order to gain a broader picture of the situation in the church during the time of Peter and Jude. While there are striking parallels, there are also some significant differences that enrich the understanding of their situations—much as reading the four Gospels helps one to gain a fuller portrait of the life and ministry of Jesus. Thus far, it has proven impossible to know the nature of the relationship between *2 Peter* and *Jude*, but the parallels are undeniable.

**Opening Activity and Discussion:** Have the class read together *2 Peter 2:1–19* and *Jude 3–16*. Compare the two passages for similarities and differences and discuss the situation in the early Christian church that called for this level of concern by both authors. To what extent do these passages describe an endemic situation in the Christian church?

### ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** Forces surround us that deplete our spiritual energies and destroy spiritual life. We either give in to these forces and are overcome by them, or we seek God's grace and power to overcome them. Peter says that if these forces overcome us we are worse off than if we had never known the way of righteousness.

## Bible Commentary

### I. The True and the False *(Review 2 Peter 2:1–3 with your class.)*

Peter contrasts the true prophets of 1:21 with false prophets and false teachers who have arisen within the church. They introduce destructive heresies, including a denial of Jesus and His atonement for sin, but in doing so, they bring swift destruction on themselves (*2 Pet. 2:1*). Unfortunately, “many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute” (*2 Pet. 2:2, NIV*). These individuals are motivated by greed, exploiting innocent souls in the hope of material gain (*2 Pet. 2:3, 15*). They are actively standing under the judgment of God (*2 Pet. 2:3*).

**Consider This:** What forms do false prophets take in the church and in the world today? How can we be sure to recognize them?

### II. Examples of Godliness Amid Ungodliness *(Review together 2 Peter 2:4–10.)*

Peter provides several examples to illustrate his statement in verse 3 about the judgment of the false teachers not being idle and their destruction not slumbering. First, he cites the angels who were cast out of heaven and placed “in chains of darkness to be held for judgment” (*2 Pet. 2:4, NIV*). Then he cites the ancient world—upon which God sent a destructive Flood to consume the ungodly while sparing Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others (*2 Pet. 2:5*). Next, he cites Sodom and Gomorrah, which were burned to ashes, as examples of what is going to happen to the ungodly (*2 Pet. 2:6*) in contrast to God’s act of sparing Lot, “a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless” and “was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard” (*2 Pet. 2:7, 8, NIV*).

If God could rescue Noah and Lot from the midst of ungodly situations, destined for destruction, then, Peter asserts, God also knows how to rescue godly people from trials and temptations (*peirasmós*) and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment (*2 Pet. 2:9*). Peter adds that God’s ability to do the latter “is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the flesh and despise authority” (*2 Pet. 2:10, NIV*). Such corruption and scorn are the root of the problem for those who become false teachers.

**Consider This:** Compare 1 Corinthians 10:13 and Matthew 6:13. What provisions has God made to deliver us from temptation?

### III. How to Recognize the False Teachers *(Review 2 Peter 2:10–19 with your class.)*

Several characteristics are typical of the false teachers, as Peter describes them. Besides those already mentioned, this section of the epistle identifies slander and blasphemy (*2 Pet. 2:10–12*), carousing at parties (*2 Pet. 2:13*), seduction and adultery (*2 Pet. 2:14*), greed for material gain (*2 Pet. 2:14, 15*), empty boasting, and enticing people to return to the slavery of sin from which they have just recently escaped (*2 Pet. 2:18*). (*Compare Jude 4, 8, 10–13, 16.*)

**Consider This:** According to Peter and Jude, what are the characteristics of those who put themselves forward as having some new or exciting “truth” to offer?

#### IV. The Dangers of a Return to Corruption (*Review 2 Peter 2:20–22 with your class.*)

Peter declares that those who already escaped the corruption of the world by developing a relationship with Jesus Christ but then become entangled once again in that same corruption and are overcome by it are worse off than before. Brute animals, creatures of instinct (*compare with 2 Pet. 2:12*), they are like dogs and pigs that return to their crude ways (*2 Pet. 2:22*). But God holds rational human beings to a higher standard. He has given them a “sacred command” (*2 Pet. 2:21, NIV*) to follow. It would have been better for those who return to sin never to have known the way of righteousness. Now they are accountable for so much more—and as a result, they will receive a harsher judgment. Compare Hebrews 6:4–6, 10:26–28.

**Consider This:** James 3:1 points out that teachers are held to a stricter accounting, so false teachers especially are deserving of harsh judgment. What examples of false teachers in Scripture provide warnings for us today?

#### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ It has been said that if we do not learn from the past, we are doomed to repeat it. How can we profit from reviewing the examples from the past that Peter and Jude cite? Compare 1 Corinthians 10:6–12.
- ❷ How can we be sure to recognize many of the same characteristics in false teachers today?

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Many televangelist preachers today are wealthy and powerful figures proclaiming a prosperity gospel that does not seem to conform to the gospel of Jesus or to the model of His life and ministry. Often, purported signs and miracles accompany their preaching, intended to give

credence to their claims to be using the power of God and His Holy Spirit. To what extent should these external characteristics become a basis for judging the truth of their teachings? Peter seems to suggest that there is a close connection between the characters of the false teachers and the duplicity of their teachings.

### Thought Questions:

- ❶ Why does Peter take up so much of his letter detailing the characteristics of the false teachers? Why might this imply that maintaining correct doctrine is more important than some may consider it to be?
- ❷ What doctrinal issues especially seem to be at stake in Peter's warnings? In what ways must we be alert to false teachings in these areas?

**Activity:** Have the class read together Acts 20:28–31. Discuss the responsibility of church leaders for carefully guarding the flock of God against false teachers who, like savage wolves, will not spare the flock but will distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after themselves. To what extent are we all accountable for one another?

## ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** Scholars have struggled to account for the similarities between the parallel sections of 2 Peter and Jude. It seems undeniable, in view of the textual evidence, that either one is indebted to the other or both are indebted to another common source. Some have thought that Jude must have been indebted to Peter, because Peter was the better known of the two, and Jude might have used Peter's material to add credibility to his own writing. Others have thought that perhaps Peter used Jude's material (stripping out the noncanonical references that Jude cites) in order to add credibility to Jude's material. However, a close comparison of Jude 17, 18 with 2 Peter 3:2, 3 may suggest that both writers are pointing to an earlier common source, believed to have been inspired, reflecting the teaching of Jesus through the apostles (*compare with Ezek. 12:22, Matt. 24:48*).

**Activity:** Ask the class members to arrange, side by side in blocked columns, the parallels between 2 Peter 2:1–22 and Jude 3–16. Alternately, they can list the parallels aloud. Invite them to note the close parallels between the two chapters and the points on which they differ. How do these Bible passages complement and supplement one another in what they select to mention? How would Peter explain the similarities and differences in light of his view of revelation and inspiration, as found in 2 Peter 1:21?

# The Day of the Lord



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** 2 Pet. 3:1, 2; John 21:15–17;  
2 Pet. 3:3–13; Ps. 90:4; Matt. 24:43–51; 2 Pet. 3:14–18.

**Memory Text:** “Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness?” (2 Peter 3:11, NRSV).

In ages past, people who didn't believe in God were seen as untrustworthy, even potentially dangerous. Why? The idea was simple: if they didn't believe in God, then they didn't believe in any future judgment in which they would have to answer before Him for their deeds. Without this incentive, people would have a greater tendency to do wrong.

Though such thinking is rather antiquated (and “politically incorrect”) today, one cannot deny the logic and reason behind it. Of course, many people don't need the fear of a future judgment in order to do right. But at the same time, the prospect of answering to God could certainly help motivate correct behavior.

As we have seen, Peter was not afraid to warn about the judgment that evildoers would face before God, because the Bible is clear that such a judgment will come. In this context, Peter speaks unambiguously about the end of days, judgment, the second coming of Jesus, and the time that the “elements shall melt with fervent heat” (2 Pet. 3:10). Peter knew that we are all sinners, and thus, with such prospects before us, he asks: “What manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness?” (2 Pet. 3:11, NKJV).

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 17.

## The Line of Authority

Peter warned his readers about the kind of dangerous teachings the church would face. He cautioned against those who, while promising liberty, would lead people back into the bondage of sin, the opposite of the freedom that we have been promised in Christ.

Unfortunately, this wasn't the only false teaching that would confront the church. Another dangerous one would come. However, before Peter gets to this specific warning, he says something else first.

**“This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour” (2 Pet. 3:1, 2).**

**What** point is Peter making here about why his readers should listen to what he is writing? *See also John 21:15–17.*

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In 2 Peter 3:1, 2, Peter reminds them of the inspired words that had come before in the “holy prophets.” Thus, he was again pointing them back to the Bible, to the Old Testament. He was reminding them that they had the “sure word of prophecy” (2 Pet. 1:19). He wanted to be clear that their beliefs were grounded in the Word of God. Nothing in the New Testament justifies the idea that the Old Testament was no longer valid or of little importance. On the contrary, it is the testimony of the Old Testament that helps establish the validity of the New and the claims that Peter was making about Jesus.

But there's more. Peter then asserts a clear line from the “holy prophets” of the Old Testament to his own authority as one of the “apostles of the Lord and Saviour.” He was clear about the calling that he received from the Lord to do what he was doing. No wonder he spoke with such conviction and certainty. He knew the source of his message.

**Why must the Word of God, and not culture or our own judgment or reason, be the ultimate authority in our lives? (After all, why else would we keep the seventh-day Sabbath other than because of the Word of God?)**

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## The Scoffers

After seeking to make his readers “mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour” (2 Pet. 3:2), Peter gets into his specific warning. Perhaps, knowing how dangerous this teaching would be, he sought to impress upon it the authority with which he was writing.

**Read 2 Peter 3:3, 4. What arguments will skeptics of Christ’s return advance?**

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There’s an important similarity between those who promoted false liberty and those who were expressing skepticism about the Second Coming. The first group walked “according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness” (2 Pet. 2:10, *NKJV*); meanwhile, those who were denying the return of Christ were those who were “walking according to their own lusts” (2 Pet. 3:3, *NKJV*).

(It’s not just a coincidence that sinful passions can lead to false teachings, is it?)

The scoffers, Peter warned, will ask the pointed question, “Where is the promise of his coming?” (2 Pet. 3:4). In doing so, they will challenge the long-standing belief of Christians that Jesus will return to this earth, and soon. After all, especially because he is talking about the last days, these scoffers will bring up the undeniable reality that many Christians have died, and things do indeed continue to go on as they always have.

On the surface, it’s not an unreasonable question. Even holy Enoch, Ellen G. White wrote, saw that the righteous and the wicked “would go to the dust together, and that this would be their end” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 85), and he was troubled by it. If even Enoch, who lived before the Flood, struggled with this question, how much more so those living during the thousands of years afterward, and even down to the “last days”?

And what about us today, as Seventh-day *Adventists*? Our very name promotes the idea of Christ’s second advent. And yet, He still has not come. And yes, we do face the scoffers, just as Peter had predicted we would.

**In your own faith experience, how do you deal with the fact that Christ has not returned yet? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.**

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## A Thousand Years as a Day

**In 2** Peter 3:8–10, how does Peter respond to the argument that the scoffers will bring? What does he say that even now can help us to understand why Christ has not yet returned?

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Peter responds to the issue of the unchanging nature of the world. He reminds his listeners that it is not true that the world has continued unchanged since Creation. (Notice how Peter goes right back to the Word of God as his source and authority.) There was a time of great wickedness, after which God destroyed the world with a flood (2 Pet. 3:6). And indeed, the Flood brought about a great change to the world, one that remains with us today. Peter then says that the next destruction will be by fire, not water (2 Pet. 3:10).

Peter also wrote, “One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Pet. 3:8). In saying this, Peter may have been reflecting on the words of Psalm 90:4: “For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.” In other words, our conception of time is not like God’s; so, we need to be careful in the judgments we make about time.

From a human perspective, there does seem to be a delay in the return of Christ. But we are looking at things only from our human perspective. From God’s perspective, there is no delay. In fact, Peter is saying that extra time has been granted because God is showing His patience. He does not wish that any should perish (2 Pet. 3:9). The extra time, then, has been allowed to provide opportunity for many to repent.

Yet, warns Peter, God’s patience should not be taken as an opportunity to postpone a decision about Jesus. The day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief in the night. A thief who comes at night probably expects to sneak away unnoticed. But while the day of the Lord will come like a thief, it will certainly be noticed. As Peter says, “the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat” (2 Pet. 3:10). Thus, Peter’s message is like Paul’s: “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2).

## So What?

A young man tried to witness to his mother. He told her about the death of Jesus and the promise of His return. He was fairly proud of himself, thinking that he had done quite an eloquent job. When he finished his mini-sermon about Jesus and the Second Coming, his mother looked at him and said: “So what does that have to do with me now?”

**Read 2** Peter 3:11–13. How does Peter answer the question, “So, what does that have to do with me now?” See Matt. 24:43–51.

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As we have said, our very name Seventh-day Adventist reveals our belief in the reality of Christ’s return. The teaching is foundational; our whole Christian faith would become meaningless without the return of Christ and all that it promises.

But are we not in danger of becoming like the wicked servant in the parable of Matthew 24:43–51? We might not be doing the specific kind of evil depicted in the parable, but that’s not the point (it is, after all, a parable). Instead, what the parable warns about is that it could become easier to lower our standards, especially regarding how we treat others, and to become more like the world and less fervent in our belief in the Lord’s return.

Sure, now and then we do face those who, with their charts and prophetic calculations, claim to have the date for Christ’s return. But for the most part the danger facing Seventh-day Adventists is not that they are setting dates for Christ’s soon return. Rather, the danger is that as the years pass, the promise of the Second Coming starts to play a much smaller role in our thinking.

Yes, the longer we are here, the closer we get to the Second Coming. On the other hand, the longer we are here, the easier it is for us to imagine His return as so far away that it really doesn’t impact our daily lives. Scripture warns against this kind of complacency. As Peter said, if Jesus is to return, and we are to face judgment, Christians should live lives of holiness and godliness (2 Pet. 3:11). The reality of the Second Coming, whenever it happens, should impact how we live now.

**How much does the reality of the Second Coming affect you in your daily life and thinking? What, if anything, does your answer say to you about your life and faith?**

## A Final Appeal

Peter ends his epistle with a theme that has pervaded it from the start: living holy lives and being careful not to be led astray by “the error of the wicked” (2 *Pet.* 3:17).

**Read 2 Peter 3:14–18.** To whom is Peter appealing, and what is he warning about in this appeal?

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How interesting that Peter ends his epistle with an appeal to the writings of “our beloved brother Paul” (2 *Pet.* 3:15). Paul also wrote of the need to live at peace while waiting for the second coming of Jesus and to use the time to develop holy lives (see *Rom.* 2:4, *Rom.* 12:18, *Phil.* 2:12).

Also notice the way that Peter’s reference to the writings of Paul shows that Paul’s writings were highly valued early in Christian history. Whether or not Peter is referring to the whole collection of Paul’s writings now found in the New Testament or only a subset of them cannot be determined. Nevertheless, Peter’s comments show that Paul’s letters were highly regarded.

Finally, Peter comments that Paul’s writings can be misconstrued, just like other Scriptures. The Greek word *grapha* literally means “writings,” but in this context it clearly means “sacred writings,” such as the books of Moses and the prophets. Here is very early evidence that Paul’s writings had taken on authority, like the authority of the Hebrew Bible.

And considering what we read earlier about false teachers who promise liberty, it’s not hard to imagine people using Paul’s writings about liberty and grace as an excuse for sinful behavior. Paul strongly emphasized righteousness by faith alone (*Rom.* 3:21, 22), but nothing in his writings gives people a license for sin (see *Rom.* 6:1–14). Paul himself had to deal with this error in regard to what he had been preaching and teaching about righteousness by faith. Yet, Peter warns, those who twist his writings do so at the risk of “their own destruction” (2 *Pet.* 3:16).

**What are choices you can make right now that can help you to live the kind of life that we have been called to live in Christ Jesus?**

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**Further Thought:** From our perspective, it can seem as if the Second Coming is greatly delayed. Jesus obviously knew that we would feel this way, and in some parables He warned against what could happen if we weren't careful and watchful during this time. Take the parable of the two servants in Matthew 24:45–51 (mentioned in Wednesday's study). They both expected their master to return. But they reached two different conclusions about his return. One decided he must be ready for the master to return at any time. The other said that the master was delayed, and therefore he took it as an opportunity to act in an evil manner. "Because we know not the exact time of His coming, we are commanded to watch. 'Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching.' Luke 12:37. Those who watch for the Lord's coming are not waiting in idle expectancy. The expectation of Christ's coming is to make men fear the Lord, and fear His judgments upon transgression. It is to awaken them to the great sin of rejecting His offers of mercy. Those who are watching for the Lord are purifying their souls by obedience to the truth."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 634.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ In class, discuss your answer to Monday's question about the Second Coming. What are some ways in which we deal with the fact that Christ has not yet returned? What can we learn from one another's answers?
- ❷ What teachings, practices, and beliefs do we hold as Seventh-day Adventists that do not come from culture or reason or tradition but are solely from the Word of God?
- ❸ As we saw during the week, Peter linked sinful tendencies and passions with false teaching. The lesson had this statement: "It's not just a coincidence that sinful passions can lead to false teachings, is it?" Why is it not just a coincidence? What could be the various links between the two?
- ❹ Albert Einstein presented to the world the amazing idea that time is not absolute. That is, depending on where you are and how fast you are moving, time in your frame of reference will be different from someone else's in another frame of reference. The point is, time is something very mysterious, and it acts in ways that we don't fully understand. How might this idea help us to realize that time for God is not the same as it is for us, especially in the context of Christ's having not yet returned?

## Mother of Many: Part 2

Every week, we talked about God and read from the Bible. We prayed together, and then we ate. At first, I think they listened just to be polite and get a hot meal. But as time went by, they became more interested in what I was trying to teach them.

Soon the boys were treating me like a mother, confiding in me and trusting me. Some of them told me about their desire to get rid of their drug habits or about things they had stolen. I listened and counseled them about how to live a happy, honest life instead. I told them about the joys of hard work and honest labor. I told them about people in the Bible and how they resisted temptation and followed God's plan, often changing the world around them. The boys listened and were inspired to trust God to change them. I encouraged the ones who had parents to return home to their families. It took a lot of talking, but eventually some decided to go home.

One boy, Pierre, had run away from home when he was only seven years old. He had lost some money he was supposed to take to his mother, and he was afraid of being punished. So, he ran away. Eventually he arrived in the capital city, where he lived on the streets for the next eight years. After I told him the story of the prodigal son, Pierre agreed to return home. But he was afraid to go by himself. So, I agreed to go with him.

We went to the bus station together and bought tickets to his hometown. When we arrived, we walked down almost forgotten streets until he found his house. His mother stared at the tall young man standing in front of her, unable to tell that this was the little boy she had lost so long ago. She thought her son was dead. She stared at Pierre for a long minute. When her mind at last grasped whom she was seeing, she threw her arms around him and hugged him tightly, weeping for joy. Then she began calling her neighbors to see her son, who had been lost but had come home. That night there was joy in one home over a lost child who had returned.

I stayed in Pierre's town overnight so I could take him to visit the local pastor. I explained that Pierre had recently accepted Jesus as his Savior and returned to his mother's house. He would need lots of nurturing.

*To be continued in next week's Inside Story.*

## *The Lesson in Brief*

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► **Key Texts:** 2 Peter 3:1–7, 11–13

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Understand that the coming judgment is just as certain as God's actions in the past.

**Feel:** Be grateful that God is patient and not willing that any should perish, and be confident that He is striving to save everyone He can.

**Do:** Live a holy and godly life, blameless and at peace with God, looking forward to and hastening Christ's return.

► **Learning Outline:**

### **I. Know: The Certainty of Judgment**

**A** On what basis do scoffers want to deny the impending return of Christ?

**B** To what evidence does Peter point his readers for the certainty of coming judgment?

### **II. Feel: Confidence in the Face of Judgment**

**A** Why is time viewed differently by God than by us? Why are we often so impatient when God is so patient? Do we care for souls as much as He does?

**B** What ground for confidence does Peter cite in the face of impending judgment?

### **III. Do: Preparation for Judgment**

**A** Peter appeals for what attitude and actions in view of the coming destruction?

**B** Why does Peter encourage us to hasten Christ's return in view of the fact that God is patiently waiting for all to come to repentance?

► **Summary:** Peter contrasts the attitudes of those who eagerly look forward to the judgment, the eradication of sin, and the new creation with the attitudes of scoffers who want to deny the original Creation, the judgment at the Flood, and the coming final judgment and new creation. He appeals to his readers to act appropriately in view of that which is certain to occur.

## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *2 Peter 3:1, 10–14*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Peter has written both of his letters in order to stimulate his readers to “wholesome thinking” (*2 Pet. 3:1, NIV*). This thinking has to do with preparing for judgment at the coming “day of God,” when the atmospheric heavens will be destroyed by fire and the elements of the earth will melt with intense heat (*2 Pet. 3:12*). Scoffers willfully deny that such judgment is coming. They argue that God has not intervened in the past, so we should not expect His intervention in the future. Believers in Scripture know that God intervened at Creation and at the worldwide Flood and that He will do so again, but with fire (*2 Pet. 3:3–7*). This knowledge is motivation for living holy and godly lives in preparation for such severe judgment (*2 Pet. 3:11, 14*).

**Just for Teachers:** Romans 1:18–21 points out that, based on abundant evidence in the natural world, there is no excuse for ignorance about the power and deity of God. Yet, Peter points to scoffers in the last days who deny God’s intervention in history, whether in the past or in the future.

The scoffers of the last days teach uniformitarianism. This view posits that history is an unbroken cycle of material causes and effects, which account for all data without any supernatural intervention. Asserting that history is a closed continuum, they insist that there is a fundamental homogeneity between all events such that an analogy can be made between any two or more points, and the present provides the clues to explain the past and the future. “ ‘All things continue as they have been since the beginning of creation,’ ” scoffers assert (*2 Pet. 3:4, HCSB*).

By ruling out the supernatural *a priori*, skeptics of the Bible are able to control the variables and, assuming uniformity in rates of change, extrapolate backward to postulate long ages of time during which microevolution eventually results in macroevolution. Thus, they can deny a relatively recent literal six-day Creation, as claimed in Scripture, as well as Noah’s worldwide flood, which produced the world more or less as we know it today.

Denying God’s activity in past history, including Creation and judgment, they feel confident about denying God’s activity in the future, including final judgment and a new creation. Peter says that these claims are willful ignorance in the face of historical reality.

**Opening Activity and Discussion:** Ask the class to read together 2 Peter 3:1–4 and Jude 17–19. Discuss the issue of skepticism about biblical claims regarding God’s activity in history. To what does Peter refer when he speaks of “the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets” (2 Pet. 3:2, *NIV*)? What is “the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles” (2 Pet. 3:2, *NIV*) to which he refers? In what ways may we be guilty of being skeptical about biblical claims?

## ►STEP 2—Explore

### Bible Commentary

#### I. Judgment Delayed Is Not Judgment Deflected (*Review together 2 Peter 3:8–13.*)

Despite an apparent delay in the anticipated day of judgment, which leads many to scoff at its prospect, Peter assures his readers that any seeming slowness of God to fulfill His promise of judgment in no way decreases the certainty of judgment. God views time not from the human perspective of a brief lifetime but from the divine perspective of eternity (*compare with Ps. 90:4*). He is patient about bringing judgment, unwilling that any should perish, wanting all to come to repentance.

Nevertheless, the day of the Lord *will* come. Like a thief in the night, it will catch many by surprise because they did not heed Jesus’ command to keep alert and to watch. It will be a cataclysmic event. Both atmospheric heavens and the elements of earth will be completely destroyed by a roaring inferno of fire, which John calls a lake or sea of fire (*Rev. 20:14*).

Peter’s appeal is vivid: “Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming” (2 Pet. 3:11, 12, *NIV*). (Note that Peter here conflates all of the end-time judgment events into a single description. He does not attempt to separate the Second Coming from the final judgment but melds them together into the eschatological day of the Lord. One must not attempt to reconstruct an end-time sequence of events from this passage, because that is not Peter’s purpose. Rather, he is talking about preparation for judgment.)

**Consider This:** The Second Coming, as far as each one of us individually is concerned, is never farther away than a moment after we die.

#### II. How to Prepare for Judgment (*Review 2 Peter 3:14–18 with your class.*)

Peter concludes his letter with an appeal to prepare for the coming judgment. His readers need to “make every effort to be found spotless,



blameless and at peace with [God]" (*2 Pet. 3:14, NIV*). Lest they become discouraged with the passage of time, they need to bear in mind that God's patience is meant to result in salvation for as many as possible. They also need to be on their guard against being led astray by the errors of lawless people, lest they fall from their secure position in Christ. Finally, they need to grow in the grace and knowledge of their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Each of the aforementioned statements is a recap of points that Peter has made earlier in the letter. What is new in this final section is his reference to the letters of "our dear brother Paul," who "also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters" (*2 Pet. 3:15, 16, NIV*). The problem is that because Paul's letters "contain some things that are hard to understand," "ignorant and unstable people distort" them, "as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction" (*2 Pet. 3:16, NIV*). Peter is essentially equating Paul's epistles with the rest of Scripture, acknowledging their teaching authority for the church.

**Consider This:** Peter and Paul were contemporaries who knew each other personally and respected each other. Many scholars have sought to portray them as having different theologies and being in competition with one another, but Peter shows great respect for Paul and his writings—even equating them with Scripture. What evidence do Peter's two epistles provide for the common theological perspectives that they share?

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What relevance do the issues of Creation and Noah's flood have for the question of the scoffers who in essence say, "Where is this coming He promised?"
- ❷ Peter uses the destruction of this creation by conflagration as an incentive for living holy and godly lives (*2 Pet. 3:11*). Why do you think he resorts to this kind of motivation?

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Hebrews 11:6 informs us that "without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (*NIV*). If we do not believe that we are accountable to God and that there will be a judgment against sin and a reward for the righteous, there is no point in believing in God, for we have no one to answer to and there is no future to look forward to.

**Thought Questions:**

- ① The scoffers to whom Peter refers see history as an unbroken continuum of cause and effect with, perhaps, some very slow evolutionary changes but no cataclysmic events. Why is it critical to our spiritual well-being to avoid this type of thinking?
- ② Some look forward to the coming judgment with eager anticipation, while others fear being consumed in the lake of fire. What is my attitude toward the coming judgment, and why?

**Activity:** Have the class read together Malachi 4:1–3. Discuss the two groups and the two options presented in this text. To which group do we choose to belong? What needs to happen in order for us to be found in the latter group?

**►STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** The issue of an apparent delay in Christ's return is not an easy one, but Peter suggests that it is a matter of perspective. Given that God knows the day and hour of His coming (*Matt. 24:36*) and that He “ ‘who is coming will come and will not delay’ ” (*Heb. 10:37, NIV*), there is no delay from God's perspective. As Ellen G. White says, “God's purposes know no haste and no delay.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 32. Delay is only from the human perspective, because we do not view time as God does. There seems to have been a delay because we expected the event of His coming to happen sooner; but God's plans have not changed. He would like to have been able to come sooner, but He could not because we have not done the preparatory work He has given us to do. This failure on our part, however, does not take God by surprise or cause Him to delay His plans. He knew what was going to happen even if He provided for it to happen sooner.

**Activity:** Have the class create on a whiteboard or large poster board a time line of history from a biblical perspective, plotting major events using an approximate scale to represent a rough chronology. Locate where we find ourselves today on the time line of history and prophecy, and discuss with the class how Peter's message of preparation for final judgment is relevant for today's readers. Alternately, where whiteboard or poster board are unavailable, ask class members to list major events in biblical history in chronological order, and then lead them in the discussion of how Peter's message of preparation for final judgment is relevant for us today.

# Major Themes in 1 and 2 Peter



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Isa. 53:5, 6, 9; Lev. 16:16–19; Lev. 11:44; Rom. 13:1–7; 1 Cor. 14:40; 2 Tim. 3:16.*

**Memory Text:** “He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24, NRSV).

First and 2 Peter were written for practical purposes. In 1 Peter, the big issue Peter confronted was the persecution that Christians were facing. In 2 Peter, the great issue was false teachers. Peter wrote forcefully and authoritatively as he sought to encourage his readers, as well as warn them in regard to the challenges before them.

What is significant is that Peter responds to both issues in theological terms. The sufferings caused by persecution led Peter to meditate on the sufferings and death of Jesus, which had resulted in our salvation. The false teachers are going to face the judgment. This judgment will take place after Jesus returns to this earth with the saved after the thousand years in heaven have ended. These are some of the themes that Peter deals with in his two letters.

This final week's lesson will look in more detail at five of the themes Peter wrote about: the suffering of Jesus that led to our salvation; our practical response to the knowledge that God will judge our actions at the last judgment; the hope we have in the soon return of Jesus; order in society and in the church; and the role Scripture has in providing guidance in our lives.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 24.

## Suffering, Jesus, and Salvation

**Read** the following passages, and note what each reveals about salvation:

1 Pet. 1:2 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Pet. 1:8, 9 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Pet. 1:18, 19 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Pet. 2:22–25 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Pet. 3:18 \_\_\_\_\_

When Peter mentions salvation, it is usually in the context of Jesus' suffering as a Substitute for sinners. For example, in 1 Peter 2:22–24, when Peter writes about the suffering of Jesus, he is using language that reflects Isaiah 53:5, 6, 9. "[Jesus] bore our sins in His own body" on the cross and "by whose stripes you were healed" (1 Pet. 2:24, *NKJV*) reveal the ideas of substitution and sacrifice.

In many of the sacrifices described in the Hebrew Bible, sinners brought their offerings to the temple and laid their hands on them. This act symbolically transferred the sin from the sinner to the animal, which then died in the sinner's place (*Lev. 4:29, 30, 33, 34; 14:10–13*). The uncleanness of sin that accumulated on the altar was cleansed and removed on the Day of Atonement (*Lev. 16:16–19*).

The blood of the sacrifice played an important role in atoning for sin. Christians have been ransomed by the precious blood of Jesus (1 Pet. 1:18, 19). Paul, too, expressed the same idea of substitution: Jesus, who knew no sin, became sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21). As 1 Peter 3:18 states, Christ suffered for sins, the righteous (Jesus) for the unrighteous (us).

Like Paul (*Rom. 3:21, 22*), Peter emphasizes the need for faith. As he says to his readers: "Although you have not seen him, you love him . . . for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. 1:8, 9, *NRSV*). Salvation is not earned by godly behavior, but it is granted when we believe in what Jesus has done for us and accept Him as our personal Savior. Our assurance is found in Him, not in ourselves. If it were in ourselves, what real assurance would we have?

**Why is Jesus, as your Substitute, the Great Hope of salvation?  
What comfort can you draw from this wonderful truth?**

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## How Should We Live?

A theme that Peter returns to more often than any other is posed by the question he asked in 2 Peter 3:11: “Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness?” (NRSV).

**Read** the following texts. What does Peter say about Christian behavior? 1 Pet. 1:15–17, 22; 1 Pet. 2:1; 1 Pet. 3:8, 9; 1 Pet. 4:7–11; 2 Pet. 3:11.

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Peter considers Christian behavior at many points in his two letters, and a number of themes keep recurring. First, Peter twice emphasizes the link between the judgment of God and Christian behavior (1 Pet. 1:17 and 2 Pet. 3:11). God will judge everyone’s actions. Thus, a Christian should live a life of holiness.

Second, several times Peter mentions that Christians should be holy. In the Hebrew Bible, things that are holy are set aside for use in the temple (Exod. 26:34; 28:36; 29:6, 37) or for God’s purposes (for example, the Sabbath in Genesis 2:3). In fact, God’s plan was that His people should be holy, just as He is holy, a theme Peter touched on, too (Lev. 11:44; 19:2; 1 Pet. 1:15, 16). The process of setting something aside as holy is called “sanctification,” and Peter’s desire is that his readers become sanctified by the Spirit and be obedient to Jesus (1 Pet. 1:2).

Third, Peter has provided some specifics as to the kind of behavior appropriate to those who are sanctified. They should rid themselves of malice, guile, insincerity, envy, and slander (1 Pet. 2:1). They should have unity in spirit, love for one another, and a humble mind (1 Pet. 3:8, 9). They should have goodness, godliness, and love (2 Pet. 1:5–7). Indeed, they must maintain constant love (1 Pet. 4:7–11). Finally, Peter urges his listeners to cast their anxiety upon Jesus (1 Pet. 5:7).

**How can we learn to encourage one another in ways that are not judgmental, to live the kind of life that Peter is calling for in his epistles?**

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## Hope in the Second Coming

**Read** the following texts, and note what is said about future events:

1 Pet. 1:4 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Pet. 1:17 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Pet. 4:5, 6 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Pet. 4:17 \_\_\_\_\_

2 Pet. 3:1–10 \_\_\_\_\_

One of the crucial issues facing those who first read and heard 1 Peter was persecution. Peter comforts his readers with the thought that, even though their lives may be hampered by persecution, there is a future reward waiting for them in heaven, a reward that cannot be taken away. Very early in 1 Peter, he mentions that Christians have an imperishable inheritance kept in heaven for them (1 Pet. 1:4).

Peter highlights two things that will take place in the future: the last judgment and the fiery destruction of evil. In other words, he shows that although there is persecution now, justice and judgment will be done, and believers will receive their eternal reward.

Peter mentions judgment on three separate occasions (1 Pet. 1:17; 4:5, 6, 17). He says that God the Father judges all humans impartially according to their deeds (1 Pet. 1:17). He notes that Jesus Himself stands ready to judge the living and the dead (1 Pet. 4:5). He also makes the intriguing observation that judgment starts with the household of God (1 Pet. 4:17).

Peter also emphasizes that “the godless” will be destroyed in a worldwide firestorm (2 Pet. 3:7).

Peter spends some time dealing with problems that arose about whether or not Jesus is indeed coming back (2 Pet. 3:1–10). He points out that the “delay” of Jesus’ second coming is to allow more people to repent and be saved. He also points out that the certainty of a future reckoning should convince everyone to live a holy and blameless life.

Thus, however focused Peter is on the here and now and on practical Christian living, he still keeps before his readers the future hope that awaits them. In short, whatever the circumstances at the moment, they need to press on ahead in faith and obedience.

**Why, too, must you press on ahead in faith and obedience, regardless of your circumstances? What other option is there?**

## Order in Society and in the Church

**Read** the following passages. What does Peter say in these texts about the importance of both government and church leadership and how Christians should respond to both? How should his words be applied to our situations today, regardless of where we live?

*1 Pet. 2:11–21* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*1 Pet. 5:1–5* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Peter lived at a time when Christians occasionally were persecuted by government and by religious authorities. This makes all the more significant what he and Paul have to say about the proper role of government authorities (*1 Pet. 2:13–17, Rom. 13:1–7*). For both Peter and Paul, government authorities have been put in place by God Himself to act as a check against those who would do evil. Of course, there are times that ruling powers can be the problem. Christians faced this in Peter's time, and it would only get worse for many years.

But, generally, the idea is that good government would preserve law and order and safety. Even today there are examples in which law and order have broken down, and one can see the desperate need for reasonable government. It is true: good government is one of the blessings of God that He has given to humanity.

Peter would no doubt share Paul's conviction that good church governance is important, too. Paul insists, "Let all things be done decently and in order" (*1 Cor. 14:40*) in church worship services. Peter likewise asks the church leaders to "tend the flock of God that is in your charge" (*1 Pet. 5:2, NRSV*). They are to do so with humility and care. Local churches need to be led well. Good leaders provide vision and coherence and enable others to exercise their spiritual gifts for the glory of God.

**First Peter 5:5 says that you should clothe yourself with humility toward one another. How can we learn to do that? What can you do, yourself, to apply this in your own interaction with others?**

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## The Primacy of Scripture

**Read** the following passages. What do they say about the Bible that could help us to understand today what its role should be in our lives and faith?

1 Pet. 1:10–12 \_\_\_\_\_

2 Pet. 1:16–20 \_\_\_\_\_

2 Pet. 3:2 \_\_\_\_\_

2 Pet. 3:16 \_\_\_\_\_

In his second letter, Peter confronts false teachers. He directs his readers to two sources of authority when he says, “You should remember the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets, and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken through your apostles” (2 Pet. 3:2, *NRSV*). Today we have the same recourse to the words of “holy prophets”—that is, the Old Testament. The living apostles are no longer available to us, of course, but in a sense we have something better: their inspired testimony, as revealed in the New Testament. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John left us the definitive story of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. In the Acts of the Apostles, we have been left accounts of the apostles’ activities. And indeed we can read the inspired words of the apostles themselves. Paul writes strongly about the authority of God’s Word (2 Tim. 3:16). Peter, then, is directing his readers to Scripture as the source of doctrinal and moral authority.

In 2 Peter 3:16, Peter warns his readers and listeners that even though Scripture is the source of truth, without careful attention to the message that the Holy Spirit would have us understand, the source of truth itself can be misunderstood, and this can lead to terrible consequences.

His words should be a good reminder to us now about basic principles for studying the Bible. We should read a passage of Scripture prayerfully. We should read it with regard to its contexts within the chapter, the book, and the entire Bible itself. What was the author specifically talking about when he wrote? We should read it in the light of the historical circumstances in which it was written. (In the case of 1 and 2 Peter, this would be the Roman Empire of the first century.) We should read it seeking spiritual insight and with the knowledge that the salvation brought about by the sacrificial death of Christ is the center of the biblical message (1 Pet. 1:10–12). Finally, we should read it in the context of our own lives. What truth does God wish us to receive? How can we apply the Written Word to our own lives in a way that will make a positive contribution to the kingdom of God?



**Further Thought:** Even amid the heavy theology, Peter's letters put a strong emphasis on Christian life and how we should treat one another. In other words, yes, we need to know the truth as it is in Jesus. But even more important, *we need to live the truth, too*. Early on, we get these grand words: "Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart" (*1 Pet. 1:22, NKJV*). Notice how he links the purifying of our souls with obedience to the truth. The truth changes us, making us into people who love one another fervently and with "a pure heart." Obedience, purity of heart, and love—all three are related to one another. This is the ideal we should be striving for. Can you imagine how different our lives and our churches would be were we to follow this charge? Think what it would do for the sense of church unity, if nothing else. "Brethren, will you carry the spirit of Christ with you as you return to your homes and churches? Will you put away unbelief and criticism? We are coming to a time when, more than ever before, we shall need to press together, to labor unitedly. In union there is strength. In discord and disunion there is only weakness." —Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, pp. 373, 374.

### Discussion Questions:

- ① In 2 Peter 3:12, the apostle wrote that we should be "looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat" (*NKJV*). What does he mean that we should be "hastening" the day of God? How can we hasten the day of God; that is, the Second Coming?
- ② We say that nature is God's "second book." Unfortunately, as with God's first book (the Bible), this second book can be misinterpreted. For example, for many people the message of design and purpose has been expunged from nature, replaced by the Darwinian notion of random mutation and natural selection. The world, we are told, isn't really designed; rather, it just looks that way to us. How, then, are we to read and interpret this second book in the right way? What are the limits of what the second book can teach us about God? What help can we get from the first book that can aid us in understanding the second one correctly? What happens when our interpretation of nature, the second book, contradicts our interpretation of the first one, the Bible? Where is the problem?

## Mother of Many: Part 3

The pastor in Pierre's hometown told us that the church was planning evangelistic meetings soon, and Pierre promised to attend. Later the pastor informed me that Pierre had been baptized and was attending church faithfully. One more lost sheep had found his way home.

Other boys in our group left the city, promising to return home.

I continued meeting with the boys who stayed. They formed a tight and protective circle around me and did not want any other boys to join the group. Often they would warn me, "Mama, watch out for that boy over there. Do not trust him. He might try to steal your bag." But in spite of their efforts to protect me from newcomers, it was not long before the group of boys had grown from 15 to more than 30.

It became harder and harder for me to provide a nutritious meal for the boys every week. I could not afford that much food or the time to prepare it. My heart ached for these boys, but I could not continue feeding them. Others offered to help occasionally, but still the task fell on me. At last, I had to tell them that I could not continue providing a meal. I did continue to meet with them regularly, and whenever they saw me around town, they always called me "Mama." I continued to pray for them as well, asking God to speak to them so that they would be ready to meet Him in heaven, where the table is always filled with food.

This quarter, a portion of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help to build a mission academy for young people in Libreville, Gabon. The school will provide a way to minister to many youth in this French-speaking West African country.

The Thirteenth Sabbath Offering also will help to build a youth center at Babcock University in Nigeria, where the majority of the 10,000 university students are non-Seventh-day Adventists, including many Muslims who are coming from the north of Nigeria.

For more inspiring mission stories from around the world, visit [www.AdventistMission.org/mission-quarterlies](http://www.AdventistMission.org/mission-quarterlies) and [www.mission360.org](http://www.mission360.org). You can also find us on Facebook.

Thank you for supporting Adventist Mission through your prayers and generous gifts!

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*ANASTASIE NDAH is a Bible worker in Yaoundé, Cameroon. She also has carried on an extensive ministry among prostitutes in the city, offering them hope for a better life here and a future in heaven. Several of the women, as well as her boys, have given their hearts to the Lord.*

## *The Lesson in Brief*

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► **Key Texts:** 2 Peter 3:1, 2, 17, 18

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Reflect on the key theological issues that Peter has written about and consider their harmony with the testimony of the rest of Scripture.

**Feel:** Thrill with the assurance of eternal life in Christ and the hope of His soon return.

**Do:** Be on guard against deception and allow these teachings to help him or her to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

► **Learning Outline:**

### I. Know: The Centrality of Jesus Christ

**A** How does Peter place Jesus Christ and Scripture at the center of all of his teachings?

**B** How does Peter weave the doctrines of justification, sanctification, and glorification by faith in Jesus Christ into his various teachings?

### II. Feel: Hope and Assurance

**A** In what various ways does Peter instill a sense of hope and assurance in his readers, many of whom are suffering for their faith?

**B** What response does Peter expect his readers to have in view of the coming judgment?

### III. Do: Living in Light of the Judgment

**A** How should the atoning work of Christ affect the believer's relation to the judgment?

**B** In what ways should the believer's sense of accountability to God affect his or her lifestyle choices as a Christian?

► **Summary:** Peter especially highlights five areas of Christian theology: (1) the centrality of Jesus' substitutionary sacrifice for our salvation, (2) godly conduct as the proper response to coming judgment, (3) the hope of Christ's soon return, (4) God's plan for order in society and the church, and (5) the role of Scripture in our lives.

## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *2 Peter 1:2–4, 12–15*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** God has provided us with everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him and of Jesus our Lord. Peter reminds us that He has given us great and precious promises in which resides the power to overcome our sinful natures and to participate in the divine nature.

**Just for Teachers:** As far as possible, keep in view the five areas of theology that we are focusing on this week. Attempt to integrate them into a wholistic view of the role of Christ in the life and in the experience of a Christian. Peter portrays Jesus as the model Sufferer through His substitutionary sacrifice for our justification. God calls us to holiness (sanctification) in our daily conduct, as a response to coming judgment. We have the hope of glorification at Christ's return. In view of our preparation for living in God's eternal kingdom, we need to understand and implement the principles of divine order in society and in the church. The Scriptures are the instruction manual for all of this preparation and implementation, and they must play a central role in the Christian life. They will keep us from being deceived by the many false teachers who want to lead us astray and cause us to fall from our faithful adherence to the truth as it is found in Jesus.

**Opening Activity and Discussion:** Ask the class to read together 2 Peter 1:2–4, 12–15 and 3:1, 2, 17, 18. Discuss what Peter indicates his purposes are for writing his two letters to the believers scattered throughout Asia Minor. How do these purposes relate to the five theological themes that our lesson focuses on this week? What connects these various themes together in an integrated whole in Peter's letters?

### ►STEP 2—Explore

#### Bible Commentary

**I. The Cost of Our Salvation** (*Review together 1 Peter 1:18, 19; 2:22–25; 3:18.*)

The language of Redemption is the language of cost or expense. How much did it cost God to redeem fallen humankind? The price could not be paid with silver, gold, or any material substance. The law demanded the life of the sinner. The only way to redeem the sinner was to substitute

life for life. This lesson was clearly taught in the Old Testament sanctuary services, and Jesus came to fulfill the type of the sacrificial lamb (*John 1:29; Rev. 5:6, 9*). The only life that was adequate to pay the price for all of humanity was the life of its Creator. By His precious blood, God redeemed humankind from the curse of the law by making Jesus a curse for us on the cross (*Gal. 3:10, 13*). There is no other means of salvation.

**Consider This:** What is the cost of salvation? Why was Christ's the only life adequate enough to pay the price of Redemption for all of humanity?

## II. The Response to Our Salvation (*Review together 1 Peter 1:13–17; 2:1, 2, 11, 12; 3:8, 9; 4:7–11; 2 Peter 3:11, 14.*)

In response to God's mercy toward us, we desire to share in His holiness—to live godly lives in this world, demonstrating the principles of the kingdom into which we have been born and in which we desire to live eternally. As we face the day of God's judgment and the destruction of this present creation and of all that pertains to sin, we need to consider what kind of persons we ought to be in all of our conduct, knowing God's expectations. He calls us to be holy and godly, modeling love and good deeds before unbelievers, so that they will glorify God on the day of judgment, rather than finding cause for accusation.

**Consider This:** In view of the coming cataclysm, what kind of person ought I to be in all holy conduct and godliness?

## III. The Hope of Our Salvation (*Review together 1 Peter 1:3–9, 13; 5:4; 2 Peter 3:3–14.*)

Peter holds out before the believer the “living hope” of an inheritance that will never perish, which is the goal of faith, namely, the salvation of our souls (*1 Pet. 1:3, 4, 9*). He says that this inheritance will take place when Jesus Christ is revealed at the end of time. Although skeptics will arise who will scoff at our hopes in Christ's coming, Peter assures the believer that any apparent delay is only because we have failed to repent and prepare adequately. Thus, God elects to wait until we become serious enough about our salvation to make the necessary preparation. When the longed-for coming finally occurs, this present earth and sky will be destroyed by a roaring inferno. In view of this impending scenario, we ought to live holy and godly lives as we not only look forward to that day but also help to speed its coming.

**Consider This:** What is the “living hope” to which Peter refers? What are the reasons for what appears like a delay in Christ's coming, and how may we hasten His return?

#### IV. Following the Divine Order *(Review 1 Peter 2:11–21, 5:1–5 with your class.)*

As believers prepare for living eternally under God’s system of order, they need to learn to understand and adhere to the divine order in society and in the church. God’s order has established authorities, whether in civil and governmental affairs, in business and employment relationships, in marriage and family relationships, or in church relationships. At all levels, one needs to work within the guidelines of divine order, showing love and respect to all and submission to those in authority. Peter provides specifics for some of these relationships and upholds Jesus as the model for being submissive and for not threatening or retaliating when mistreated.

**Consider This:** How does submitting to God’s system of order in society and in the church help to prepare us for living eternally under His system of order in heaven?

#### V. The Role of Scripture *(Review together 1 Peter 1:10–12; 2 Peter 1:19–21; 3:2, 15, 16.)*

Peter reminds his readers that Scripture is the final authority for the Christian. The Word of God is not of human initiative; it came about by divine revelation as the Holy Spirit moved on the minds of human agents. It is an objective source of truth that can be trusted. It was recorded and preserved especially for the benefit of those who would live in the time of the fulfillment of the prophecies. Even the writings of New Testament apostles and prophets (such as Paul), who spoke for God and whose writings have been preserved and circulated for the instruction of the churches, have the same authority as that of the Old Testament Scriptures. We will do well to heed them as we would heed a light shining in a dark place until Jesus reigns supreme in our hearts.

**Consider This:** Why is Scripture the final authority on God’s will for the Christian? Why can we trust it?

#### Discussion Questions:

- ① New Testament epistles are characterized primarily by theological instruction and practical admonition. In 1 and 2 Peter, what kind of balance do you find between these two elements?
- ② How do Peter’s letters compare theologically with those of Paul?

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** As we draw this series of lessons to a close, it would be helpful to encourage the class to summarize some of the key ideas from

Peter's epistles that they have found useful in their own lives. Many of these ideas may be related to one of the five key themes highlighted this week. Some students may find other ideas that stand out for them. What is important is that each person should find something that is meaningful to his or her own life and experience.

#### Thought Questions:

- ❶ What role does Scripture play in my spiritual life? Is it primarily a source for doctrine, or is it primarily a revelation of Jesus Christ, leading me to know and love Him more? Explain your answer.
- ❷ In what ways has my relationship with Jesus Christ made a difference in my relationship with others? What are the ways in which others see Jesus in me?
- ❸ What is my response to the announcement of judgment and the soon return of Christ? Am I fearful, or do I look forward to it as the fulfillment of my hopes and longings? Give reasons for your answer.

**Activity:** Invite the class to read together 2 Timothy 3:12–16. Discuss the similarity between Paul's final message to Timothy and Peter's final messages to his readers. What do they both emphasize? What do they clearly think is of vital importance for their readers?

## ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** Theological instruction is supposed to lead to changes in behavior, which is why theological instruction in the New Testament letters is generally followed by practical admonition. It is important to see the connections between the two. We need to help our class members to see these connections so that what they learn theologically will be translated into appropriate action.

**Activity:** Create a chart in two columns on a whiteboard or on a large poster board or easel pad. In the left column, identify theological instruction from 1 and 2 Peter. In the right column, identify commensurate action that Peter encourages or might encourage. Discuss both personal and corporate implementation of the actions suggested. (Where supplies are unavailable, adapt the written part of the activity to a discussion-based format by first asking members to identify a theological instruction from 1 and 2 Peter. Then ask them to identify the commensurate action that this instruction might encourage. Conclude by proceeding with the rest of the discussion as outlined.)

The Protestant world is getting ready to celebrate the 500-year anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, when Martin Luther brought to millions crucial biblical truths that were hidden under centuries of superstition and tradition. One could argue that out of the pages of Galatians (along with Romans) Protestantism itself was born. While reading Galatians, Luther first was touched with the good news of righteousness by faith, the truth that spawned the Protestant Reformation, freeing millions from centuries of error. What Luther read in this book changed him, and the world has never been the same again. Through the study of Galatians, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, centuries after Luther, rediscovered the truth of righteousness by faith. What is it about Galatians that has made it such a backbone of the Protestant Reformation? Next quarter's Bible study guide, *The Gospel in Galatians*, by Carl Cosaert, invites us to journey with the apostle Paul as he pleads with the Galatians to remain true to Jesus. At the same time, it also gives us a chance to reflect on our own understanding of the truths that opened the way for Martin Luther's inevitable break with Rome and the restoration of the biblical gospel.

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## Lesson 1—Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Persecutor of Christians** (*Acts 7:58*)

MONDAY: **Saul's Conversion** (*Acts 9:5, NKJV*)

TUESDAY: **Saul in Damascus** (*Acts 9:10–14*)

WEDNESDAY: **The Gospel Goes to the Gentiles** (*Acts 11:19–21*)

THURSDAY: **Conflict Within the Church** (*Acts 10:1–11:18*)

**Memory Text**—*Acts 11:18, NKJV*

**Sabbath Gem:** God had plans for Saul that he never could have anticipated for himself. Not only would he preach Jesus as the Messiah, he was going to do it among the Gentiles.

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## Lesson 2—Paul's Authority and Gospel

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Paul, the Letter Writer** (*2 Peter 3:15, 16*)

MONDAY: **Paul's Calling** (*Gal. 1:1, 2*)

TUESDAY: **Paul's Gospel** (*Gal. 1:3–5*)

WEDNESDAY: **No Other Gospel** (*Gal. 1:6–9, 5:12*)

THURSDAY: **The Origin of Paul's Gospel** (*Gal. 1:11–24*)

**Memory Text**—*Galatians 1:10, NKJV*

**Sabbath Gem:** Paul's message to the Gentiles was that they could join the Christian church on the basis of faith alone. When false teachers challenged him on this point, Paul wrote Galatians.

**Lessons for the Visually Impaired** The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on audio CD to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services for the Blind, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981; e-mail: [info@christianrecord.org](mailto:info@christianrecord.org); Web site: [www.christianrecord.org](http://www.christianrecord.org).