

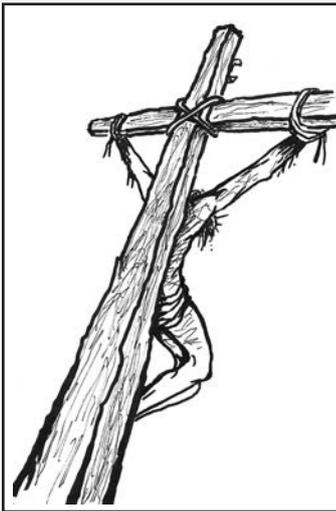
Major Themes in 1 and 2 Peter



SABBATH—JUNE 17

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Isaiah 53:5, 6, 9; Leviticus 16:16–19; Leviticus 11:44; Romans 13:1–7; 1 Corinthians 14:40; 2 Timothy 3:16.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘He himself carried our sins’ in his body on the cross (Isaiah 53:5). He did it so that we would die as far as sins are concerned. Then we would lead godly lives. ‘His wounds have healed you’ (Isaiah 53:5)” (1 Peter 2:24, NIV).



The suffering and death of Jesus led to our salvation.

PETER WRITES HIS TWO LETTERS to help believers deal with problems they face in real life. In his first letter, the big issue (problem) Peter deals with is the persecution that Christians face. In 2 Peter, the great problem is false teachers.

What is important is that Peter responds to both problems (persecution and false teachers) by pointing to Bible truth. The sufferings caused by persecution lead Peter to think about the sufferings and death of Jesus. He thinks about how these experiences resulted in (led to) our salvation. Peter also says the false teachers are going to face judgment. But their judgment will take place after Jesus returns with the saved to this earth after the thousand years in heaven have ended.

In this final week's lesson we will look in more detail at five of the themes Peter writes about: (1) the suffering of Jesus that led to our salvation; (2) our response to the truth that God will judge our actions at the last judgment; (3) the hope we have in the soon return of Jesus; (4) order in society and in the church; and (5) the importance of the Bible as a guide to the way we should live.

SUFFERING, JESUS, AND SALVATION (1 Peter 2:22–25)

Read the following verses. Write down what each one teaches us about salvation:

1 Peter 1:2 _____

1 Peter 1:8, 9 _____

1 Peter 1:18, 19 _____

1 Peter 2:22–25 _____

1 Peter 3:18 _____

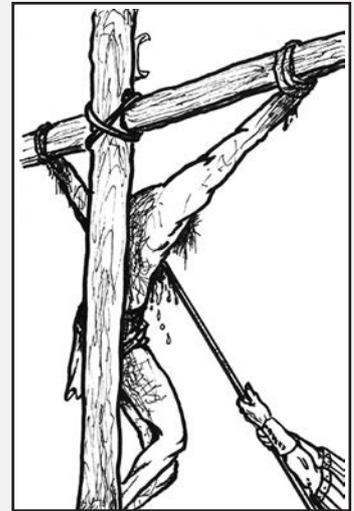
Peter often mentions salvation when he talks about Jesus' suffering as a Substitute for sinners. For example, in 1 Peter 2:22–24, Peter writes about the suffering of Jesus. He uses words that echo Isaiah 53:5, 6, 9. Peter's words give images, or word pictures, of substitution and sacrifice.

There are many sacrifices described in the Old Testament. Sinners brought their offerings to the temple. Then they laid their hands on them. This act was a symbol. It showed that the sin had been transferred from the sinner to the animal. Then the animal died in the sinner's place (Leviticus 4:29, 30, 33, 34; Leviticus 14:10–13). The blood was a symbol of sin on the altar. Then the sin was cleansed and removed on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:16–19).

The blood of the sacrifice had an important part in paying the price for sin. In a similar way, Peter says that Christians have been bought by the precious blood of Jesus (1 Peter 1:18, 19). Paul, too, expresses the same idea of substitution. He says that Jesus knew no sin. But He became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). As 1 Peter 3:18 says, Christ suffered for our sins. He is the Holy One who suffered for the unholy (us).

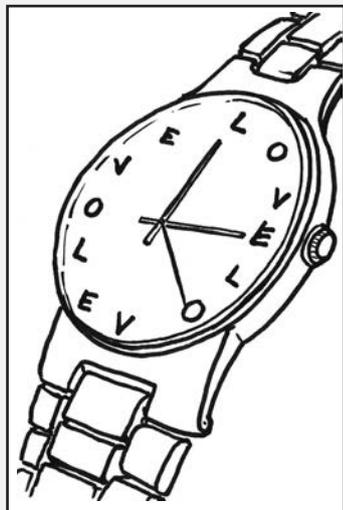
Like Paul (Romans 3:21, 22), Peter also talks about the need for faith (1 Peter 1:8, 9). His point is that salvation is not earned by godly behavior. Instead, God grants salvation to us when we believe in what Jesus has done for us and accept Him as our personal Savior. Our certainty of salvation is found in Jesus. It is not found in ourselves.

Jesus is your Substitute. Why is He the hope of salvation? What comfort can you draw from this wonderful truth?



Jesus became sin for us, and He suffered for our sins.

HOW SHOULD WE LIVE? (2 Peter 3:10, 11)



Christians who are set apart to be holy must show love at all times.

There is a theme that Peter returns to more often than any other. It is found in the question he asks in 2 Peter 3:10, 11: “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. . . . And what kind of people should you be?” (NIRV).

Read the following verses: 1 Peter 1:15–17, 22; 1 Peter 2:1; 1 Peter 3:8, 9; 1 Peter 4:7–11; 2 Peter 3:11. What does Peter say in these verses about Christian behavior?

Peter thinks carefully about Christian behavior at many points in his two letters. And each time many themes are repeated. First, Peter points out the link between the judgment of God and Christian behavior (1 Peter 1:17 and 2 Peter 3:11). In other words, God will judge everyone’s actions. So a Christian should live a holy life.

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 (Exodus 26:34; Exodus 28:36; Exodus 29:6, 37). Or they are set aside 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 (Leviticus 11:44; Leviticus 19:2). Peter touches on this theme too (1 Peter 1:15, 16). The process of setting something aside as holy is called “sanctification.” And Peter wants his readers to be set apart as holy. The Holy Spirit is the One who will set them apart. He will give them power to obey Jesus (1 Peter 1:2).

Third, Peter has given some details about the kind of behavior that is proper for those who are sanctified, or set apart to be holy (1 Peter 2:1). They should be joined as one in spirit. They should “love one another.” They should have minds that are not proud but are “humble” (1 Peter 3:8, NIRV). They should be good, godly, and loving (2 Peter 1:5–7). Indeed, they must show love at all times (1 Peter 4:7–11). Finally, Peter urges his listeners to give all their cares and worries to Jesus (1 Peter 5:7).

How can we learn to encourage one another without criticizing or judging? And how can we live the kind of life that Peter calls for in his letters?

HOPE IN THE SECOND COMING (2 Peter 3:1–10)

Read the following verses. What do they say about future events?

1 Peter 1:4 _____

1 Peter 1:17 _____

1 Peter 4:5, 6 _____

1 Peter 4:17 _____

2 Peter 3:1–10 _____

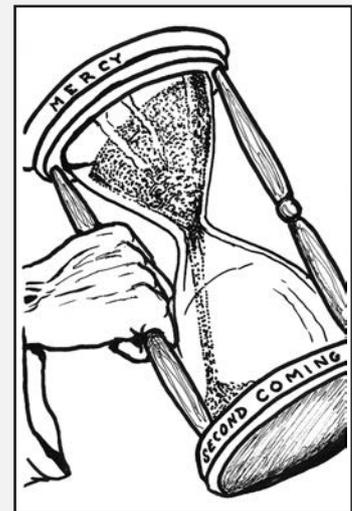
Persecution is one of the most important issues facing those who read Peter's first letter. Peter comforts his readers with the thought that there is a future reward waiting for them in heaven. It cannot be taken away, even if their lives are made difficult because of persecution.

Peter points out two things that will take place in the future: (1) the last judgment and (2) the destruction of evil by fire. Yes, there is persecution now. But Peter shows that justice and judgment will take place.

Peter mentions judgment three different times in his first letter (1 Peter 1:17; 1 Peter 4:5, 6; 1 Peter 4:17). He says that God the Father does not favor one person more than another. He judges all humans according to their deeds (1 Peter 1:17). Peter notes that Jesus Himself stands ready to judge the living and the dead (1 Peter 4:5). Peter also makes the interesting observation that judgment starts with the members of the house of God (1 Peter 4:17). And Peter also states that "ungodly people" will be destroyed in a worldwide firestorm (2 Peter 3:7, NIV).

Peter spends some time dealing with other problems. One of these problems has to do with whether or not Jesus is really coming back (2 Peter 3:1–10). Peter points out the reason for the "delay" of Jesus' second coming. It is to give people more time to turn away from sin and be saved. Peter also points out that we know for sure that there is a future judgment. So that fact should lead everyone to live a holy and blameless life. And we should push forward in faith and obedience, whatever we are facing.

Why must you also push forward in faith and obedience, whatever you are facing? What other choice is there?



Peter explains the reason for the "delay" of Jesus' second coming. It is to allow more time for people to turn away from sin and be saved.

ORDER IN SOCIETY AND IN THE CHURCH (1 Peter 2:11–21)

Read the following verses. What does Peter say in these verses about the importance of both government and church leadership? According to Peter, how should Christians respond to both? How should Peter's words be applied to our situations today, regardless of where we live?

1 Peter 2:11–21 _____

1 Peter 5:1–5 _____



The main purpose of government is to enforce law and order and to keep people safe.

Both Peter and Paul discuss the purpose of rulers and the right use of power. Peter lived at a time when government authorities and religious powers persecuted Christians. This fact makes what he and Paul have to say all the more meaningful (1 Peter 2:13–17; Romans 13:1–7). For both men, rulers have been put in place by God Himself. They are meant to act as a check against those who would do evil. Of course, there are times when ruling powers can be the problem. Christians faced this problem in Peter's time. And the problem would only get worse for many years to come.

But, overall, the main purpose of government is to enforce law and order and to keep people safe. Good government is one of the blessings that God has given to humans.

No doubt Peter would share Paul's strong belief that order is also needed in the church (1 Corinthians 14:40). Peter likewise asks the church leaders to "be shepherds of God's flock, [who are] the believers under your care" (1 Peter 5:2, NIV). Shepherds, then, are to lead and tend to the members of the church. Local churches, after all, need to be led well. Good leaders provide the church with a plan and a goal. They have the ability to bring people together and unite them in work. They help others to use their spiritual gifts for the glory of God.

First Peter 5:5 says to "put on a spirit free of pride toward one another" (NIV). How can we learn to do that? What can you do to apply this rule in your own dealings with others?

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BIBLE (2 Peter 1:16–20)

Read the following verses. What do they say about the Bible? How do these verses help us understand how important the Bible should be to our lives and to our faith?

1 Peter 1:10–12 _____

2 Peter 1:16–20 _____

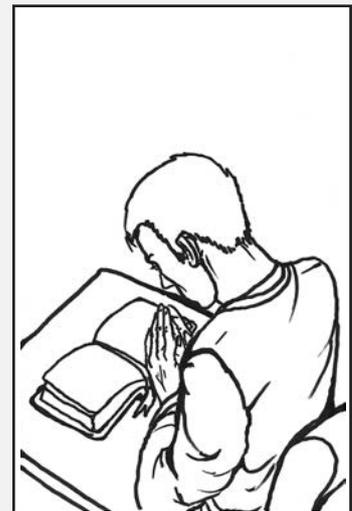
2 Peter 3:2 _____

2 Peter 3:16 _____

In his second letter, Peter points his readers to two sources of authority when he says, “I want you to remember the words the holy prophets spoke in the past. Remember the command our Lord and Savior gave through your apostles [leaders; teachers]” (2 Peter 3:2, NIV). Today we have the same opportunity to get help and wisdom for our problems from the words of “holy prophets.” And the source of that wisdom is the Old Testament. It is true that the living apostles are no longer available to us. But in a way we have something better. We have their Spirit-filled words or testimonies, which live on after them.

In 2 Peter 3:16, Peter reminds his readers that the Bible is the source of truth. But Peter warns that the Bible itself can be misunderstood. And this can lead to terrible results.

His words should be a reminder to us of nine basic rules for studying the Bible. (1) We should read the Bible with a prayerful heart. (2) We should try to understand how a certain set of verses relates to the meaning of the whole chapter where it is found. (3) How do those same verses relate to the book of the Bible where it is found? (4) And how do those verses relate to the whole Bible itself? (5) What was the author talking about when he wrote them? (6) We should understand the history or background that was happening when a group of verses was written. (7) We should read the Bible in order to find spiritual truth. Reading the Bible will give us wisdom. And it will show us that our salvation through the death of Christ is at the center of the Bible (1 Peter 1:10–12). (8) Finally, we should ask, What truth does God wish us to receive from the Bible? (9) And how can we apply that truth and the Bible to our own lives in a way that will strengthen and build up the kingdom of God?



We should study the Bible with a prayerful heart.



“When we unite, there is strength. But when we quarrel and separate from one another, there is only weakness.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, pages 374.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: In his letters, Peter places special attention on Christian life and how we should treat one another: “You have made yourselves pure by obeying the truth. So you have an honest and true love for each other. So love one another deeply, from your hearts” (1 Peter 1:22, NIV). Notice in this verse how Peter links being made pure with obedience to the truth. He is saying that the truth changes us. It makes us into people who love one another deeply and with “a pure heart.” Can you imagine how different our lives and churches would be if we truly lived up to this ideal? Think what it would do to unite us as believers in the church!

“Brothers and sisters, will you carry the spirit of Christ with you as you return to your homes and churches? Will you put away unbelief and fault finding? More than ever before, we are coming to a time when we shall need to come together and work as one. When we unite, there is strength. But when we quarrel and separate from one another, there is only weakness.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, pages 373, 374.

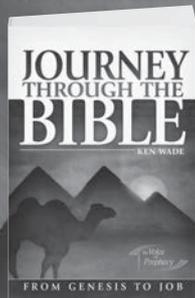
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① In 2 Peter 3:12, Peter says that we should “look forward” (NIV) to the day of God. Some Bible translations of this verse say that we should be “looking for and hastening” (NKJV) Jesus’ second coming. The word “hastening” or “to hasten” means to hurry something along or to make it happen sooner. So with this idea in mind, how can we “hasten” the coming of Jesus or help it happen sooner rather than later?

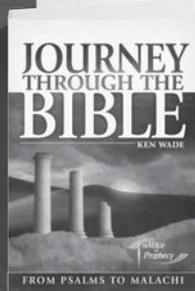
② We say the Bible is God’s “first book,” and nature is God’s “second book.” Sadly, both books can be “misread” or misunderstood. For example, many people do not believe that God created the heavens and the earth. Instead, they believe that life on this earth came about by changes that happened slowly over a long period of time. These changes are known as the theory of evolution. Those who believe in evolution teach that the world is not created by God. They say that it just looks that way. So how are we to read and understand God’s “second book” (nature) 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 (the Bible) that can help us understand the second one correctly?

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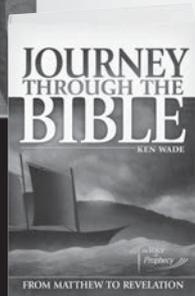
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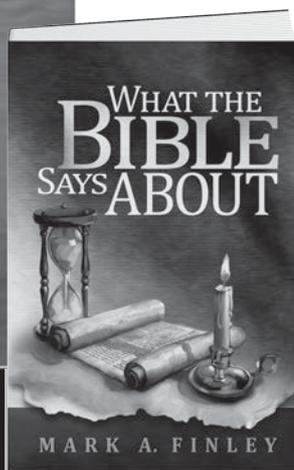
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