THE SECOND LETTER OF PETER

The King's Last Word

2 Peter, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

The King's Last Word: The Second Letter of Peter, Unfiltered

Copyright © 2026 Bill McLeod. All rights reserved.

Published by Papa Bill Books.

Scripture quotations taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. Used with permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

All Scripture quotations in this book are from the NIV. Some are abridged, with omissions marked by ellipses; paraphrases are not placed in quotation marks.

Pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence in the author's own words. Inside Scripture quotations, capitalization and wording follow the 2011 NIV exactly.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

If you've read the earlier books in this series, you know the saying by now: "If you want to get something done, hire a teenager while they still know it all." It's been in every book. Second Peter is written for people who think they know it all already, and its message is simple: keep growing, and don't let anyone talk you out of the truth.

This short letter presents itself as Peter's final words. He knows he doesn't have much time left. So he does what people often do at the end of their lives: he tells the people he loves what matters most. Grow in your faith. Remember what's true. Watch out for people who will lead you astray. And don't give up hope, because Jesus is coming back.

Second Peter might be the most debated book in the New Testament. Scholars have argued for centuries about who wrote it. We'll look at that question honestly. But whoever held the pen, Christians have recognized this letter as part of Scripture for more than sixteen hundred years, and it has a lot to say to a generation surrounded by voices telling them what to believe.

You live in a world of influencers, conspiracy theories, fake news, and people who confidently say whatever gets clicks. Peter's readers faced something similar: smooth-talking teachers who promised freedom and delivered slavery. This letter will help you tell the difference.

So read it like a last letter from someone who walked with Jesus, and who wants you to finish strong. Let's go.

How This Book Works

This book walks through all three chapters of 2 Peter, in order, one chapter of this book for each chapter of the letter. Each one explains what the letter is saying in plain language and adds background about the ancient world, the Old Testament stories Peter mentions, and the questions this letter raises.

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains why this letter reads like a farewell speech, presents the debate about who wrote it as fairly as I can, describes the false teachers it warns about, and introduces its close connection to the letter of Jude. Read it first.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the New International Version (NIV), the same translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (pronouns for God are capitalized in the author's own words out of reverence; inside Scripture quotations, capitalization follows the NIV exactly); Real Talk questions to think through alone or argue about with friends; and a Try This challenge.

This book quotes 2 Peter sparingly and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Read each chapter of the letter first, then the chapter here. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. Like the earlier books in this series, on the Gospels, Acts, Paul's letters, Hebrews, James, and 1 Peter, it's written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, with some humor, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

This book follows the letter format of the earlier volumes, walking through 2 Peter chapter by chapter. I've quoted the letter sparingly and relied mostly on paraphrase, background, and discussion material. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, in the chapters and in the Key Verses, the wording is from the New International Version (NIV).

Second Peter is the most disputed book in the New Testament. I've presented the reasons many scholars doubt that Peter wrote it, including its slow acceptance into the canon and its farewell-testament style, alongside the case for Peter's authorship, without forcing a verdict. I've also explained the letter's close relationship with Jude and the different views about which came first.

Several passages are presented with the main Christian interpretations: how prophecy and Scripture came from God (1:20–21), Tartarus and the fallen angels (2:4), the warning about those who turn away after knowing the truth (2:20–22), with a gentle note

for anxious readers, and whether the present world will be destroyed or renewed (3:10–13).

Passages highlighted as especially relevant for teens include the ladder of virtues (1:5–8), Peter's eyewitness testimony to the Transfiguration (1:16–18), discerning false teachers and online influencers (chapter 2), and God's patience, since He doesn't want anyone to perish (3:8–9).

The Real Talk questions are designed for discussion. They work well for a youth group, a small group, a family dinner table, or a car ride. Don't rush to the right answer. Let them wrestle. Faith that has been thought through tends to last.

My prayer is that every reader will keep growing, and won't be talked out of the truth.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE LETTER

Setting the Scene

A Last Letter

Imagine you knew you had only a few weeks to live. What would you tell the people you love? You probably wouldn't waste words. You'd remind them of what matters most, warn them about dangers ahead, and encourage them to keep going.

That's what 2 Peter sounds like. The writer says he knows that he will soon set aside the tent of his body, as Jesus had made clear to him (1:13–14). That probably refers to the time on the beach when Jesus told Peter that, when he was old, he would be led where he didn't want to go, which John explains as a hint about how Peter would die (John 21:18–19). So the writer wants to leave his readers a reminder they can hold on to after he's gone (1:15).

Farewell Speeches

In the ancient world, there was a popular kind of writing called a testament, or farewell speech. A famous person facing death gathers family or followers, looks back on their life, gives final instructions, and predicts what will happen after they're gone. The Bible has several. Jacob blesses his twelve sons before he dies (Genesis 49). Moses gives a long farewell to Israel (Deuteronomy 31–33). Paul says goodbye to the elders from Ephesus (Acts 20:17–38), and 2 Timothy reads like Paul's last will. Jesus Himself gave a long farewell talk to His disciples at the Last Supper (John 13–17).

Second Peter has many features of a testament: the speaker's approaching death, reminders of what he taught, warnings about false teachers who will come in the future, and encouragement to stay faithful. Outside the Bible, Jewish writers in the centuries around Jesus' time wrote many testaments in the names of famous ancient figures, like the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, which present the farewell speeches of Jacob's sons. Everyone knew that Jacob's sons hadn't written them. That's one reason some scholars think 2 Peter may belong to this kind of writing too. Others point out that real people really did give farewell messages, and that Peter, facing death, would naturally write one.

The Most Disputed Book

Of all twenty-seven books in the New Testament, 2 Peter is the one whose authorship has been most debated, and not just by modern scholars. The early church had questions too. Here are the main reasons many scholars today think it was written by someone else, perhaps a follower of Peter, after his death, writing in his name.

First, the style. The Greek of 2 Peter is very different from 1 Peter. It uses unusual, elaborate words and a style some describe as ornate. Around AD 400, the scholar Jerome noticed the difference and suggested that Peter may have used a different helper for each letter.

Second, slow acceptance. Unlike 1 Peter, 2 Peter isn't clearly quoted by any surviving writer until the third century. Origen, around AD 230, mentioned that some people doubted it. In the early fourth century, the historian Eusebius listed it among the books that were disputed, though accepted by many. It was included in Athanasius'

famous list of New Testament books in AD 367 and affirmed by church councils at Hippo and Carthage in the 390s.

Third, the letter refers to a collection of Paul's letters and seems to treat them as Scripture (3:15–16), which some think points to a later time. Fourth, the scoffers say that the ancestors have died and nothing has changed (3:4), which might suggest that the first generation of Christians had passed away. Fifth, the letter shares a great deal of material with the short letter of Jude, and many scholars think 2 Peter borrowed from it. Even John Calvin, the sixteenth-century reformer, had doubts about whether Peter wrote it himself, though he accepted it as Scripture and suggested that a disciple may have written it at Peter's direction. Scholars who hold the later view usually date it somewhere between AD 80 and 130.

The Case for Peter

Other scholars, and many Christians throughout history, believe Peter wrote this letter himself, probably shortly before his death in the mid-60s AD. Here are their main reasons.

First, the letter makes strong personal claims. The writer names himself Simeon Peter, an old Hebrew form of his name used elsewhere in the New Testament only once, by James (Acts 15:14). A forger might be expected to use the more familiar form. He claims to be an eyewitness of the Transfiguration, mentions Jesus' prediction of his death, and refers to his earlier letter (3:1).

Second, the different style might be explained by a different secretary, as Jerome suggested, or by the different subject. First Peter comforts suffering believers. Second Peter fights false teachers, and quotes or adapts material from Jude, which would affect its vocabulary.

Third, the early church was careful. It rejected many books written in Peter's name, like the Gospel of Peter and the Apocalypse of Peter, but accepted this one after long examination. Around AD 200, the writer Tertullian reports that a church leader who admitted writing a book about Paul in Paul's name was removed from his position. Supporters of Peter's authorship argue that this shows early Christians didn't accept writing in an apostle's name, even with good intentions.

Fourth, Paul's letters were shared among churches early (Colossians 4:16), and the ancestors in 3:4 could mean the Old Testament fathers, like Abraham, rather than the first Christians.

Christians who love the Bible and take it seriously hold both views. Those who think a follower wrote it usually see it as faithfully passing on Peter's teaching. All agree that it belongs in the Bible and speaks with God's authority. In this book, I call the writer Peter, as the letter does.

Who Were the Readers?

The letter doesn't say exactly where its readers lived. It's addressed broadly to believers whose faith is just as valuable as the apostles' own (1:1). But if the earlier letter mentioned in 3:1 is 1 Peter, the readers may be the same believers scattered across the provinces of what is now Turkey. Most of them were probably Gentiles who had turned to Jesus from a pagan background.

The False Teachers

Peter wrote to warn his readers about false teachers who had come into the church, or were about to. From what he says, we can piece together what they taught. They denied that Jesus would return, and they mocked the idea of a final judgment (3:3–4). They seem to have

called the apostles' teaching about Jesus' coming a set of clever myths (1:16). They claimed to offer freedom, but used it as an excuse for sexual immorality and greed (2:2–3, 13–14, 19). They were persuasive, arrogant, and good at manipulating people who were new in the faith (2:14, 18).

Some scholars think these teachers were influenced by ideas popular among Greek philosophers like the Epicureans, who taught that the gods don't get involved in human affairs, that there's no judgment after death, and that the goal of life is pleasure and freedom from fear. If there's no judgment, why not do whatever you want? Peter's answer is that God has judged before, and He will judge again.

Peter and Jude

One of the most interesting things about 2 Peter is how closely chapter 2 resembles the short letter of Jude, which comes just before Revelation in your Bible. Both warn against false teachers who are greedy, immoral, and arrogant. Both mention angels who sinned and are held in darkness for judgment, Sodom and Gomorrah, Balaam, slandering celestial beings, waterless clouds or springs, and scoffers in the last days. Many phrases are nearly identical. Clearly, one writer used the other, or both used a common source. We'll look at the different views in chapter 2.

Why 2 Peter Matters

Second Peter answers questions every generation asks. How do I know the story about Jesus isn't just a made-up myth? Where did the Bible come from? How can I tell a true teacher from a fake? If Jesus is coming back, why hasn't He come yet? What will happen to the world? And how do I keep growing instead of drifting? Peter's

answers are rooted in eyewitness testimony, Scripture, and the character of a patient God who wants everyone to come home.

The Map

Chapter 1: God's power and promises, the ladder of virtues, Peter's eyewitness testimony, and where Scripture came from.

Chapter 2: False teachers, examples of God's judgment and rescue, and the empty promise of freedom.

Chapter 3: Scoffers, God's patience, the day of the Lord, new heavens and a new earth, Paul's letters, and growing in grace.

Contents

Setting the Scene 7

1 Keep Climbing *1* 14

2 Spot the Fakes *2* 23

3 The Patient God *3* 34

Now What? The Bottom Line 42

CHAPTER 1

Keep Climbing

2 Peter 1

The letter opens with a name: Simeon Peter. He describes himself as both a servant and an apostle of Jesus. He writes to people whose faith is every bit as valuable as his own, a faith they received through the fairness and goodness of Jesus, whom he calls our God and Savior.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Equal Faith**

Peter had walked with Jesus for three years. He had seen miracles, heard Jesus teach, and met Him after the resurrection. His readers had never seen Jesus at all. But Peter says their faith is just as precious as his. There's no first-class and economy seating in God's family. The newest believer and the oldest apostle stand on the same ground: the goodness of Jesus. If you ever feel like a second-rate Christian compared to people who seem more spiritual, remember that.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Our God and Savior**

In the opening verse, Peter calls Jesus our God and Savior. In Greek, both titles are joined under a single article, which most scholars think means they refer to one person: Jesus. It's one of several places in the New Testament where Jesus is directly called God (see also John 1:1; 20:28; Titus 2:13). For a Jewish fisherman who grew up saying that there is one God, this was an astonishing thing to write about a man he had eaten breakfast with.

Peter wishes them grace and peace in full measure, as they come to know God and Jesus better. Then he reminds them what God has already given them. By His power, God has provided everything they need to live a life that honors Him. It all comes through knowing the One whose own splendor and goodness invited them in. And through that splendor and goodness, God has given them amazing, valuable promises, so that they can share in God's own nature and get free from the rot that evil desires have brought into the world.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Everything You Need**

Peter says that God has already supplied all that's required for you to live for Him. Not most things. Everything. That doesn't mean you'll never struggle, or that you don't need other people, church, or wise advice. It means you're not missing some secret ingredient. You don't need a special experience or a more spiritual personality. If you know Jesus, you have access to His power, His promises, and His Spirit. The question isn't whether God has given you enough. It's whether you'll use what He's given.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Sharing in God's Nature**

This is one of the most remarkable phrases in the Bible. Peter says believers can share in, or participate in, the divine nature. What does that mean? It doesn't mean we become gods, or that we stop being human. Orthodox Christians speak of theosis, a lifelong process in which God's grace transforms believers more and more into His likeness, so that they share in His life and love, while God remains God and we remain creatures. Catholic Christians speak of sanctifying grace, by which God shares His own life with the soul. Many Protestants understand it as union with Christ and being renewed in God's moral character, becoming holy, loving, and good as He is. All agree that God doesn't just forgive us. He changes us from the inside out.

Then comes the ladder. Because of all this, Peter says, put in every effort. Start with faith, and build on it. To faith, add goodness. To

goodness, add knowledge. Then self-control. Then endurance. Then godliness. Then love for fellow believers as family. And finally, love. If these qualities are yours and keep growing, they'll keep your knowledge of Jesus from being useless and fruitless. But if someone lacks them, they're shortsighted, even blind. They've forgotten that their old sins were washed away.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Ladder of Virtues**

Peter's list is often called a ladder, because each quality builds on the one before. Ancient writers loved lists like this; teachers called it a chain. Here's what each word means.

Faith: trust in Jesus. It's the foundation, the first rung, and everything else stands on it.

Goodness: moral excellence, being good at being good. The Greek word described anything that did its job well, like a sharp knife or a fast horse.

Knowledge: understanding God and His ways, and knowing how to apply what you know.

Self-control: mastering your desires, instead of letting them master you.

Perseverance: hanging in there when life is hard, or when you're tempted to give up.

Godliness: a life centered on God, showing reverence for Him in everyday things.

Mutual affection: the Greek word is philadelphia, love among brothers and sisters. It's treating other believers like family.

Love: the Greek word is agape, the self-giving love that God shows us, love that seeks the good of others, even enemies. It's the top of the ladder.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Effort and Grace**

Notice that Peter says to make every effort, right after he says that God has already supplied all we need. Which is it? Is the Christian life God's work, or ours? Peter's answer is both. God gives the power, the promises, and the new nature. We respond by putting in the effort. Think of it like a gift card. Someone gives it to you, and it's totally free. But if you never use it, it does

you no good. Grace isn't opposed to effort. It's opposed to earning. You don't work to be saved. You work because you've been saved, and God works in you as you do (Philippians 2:12–13).

BACKGROUND CHECK **Climbing the Ladder**

Which rung on Peter's ladder is hardest for you? Maybe self-control is a struggle, with your phone, your temper, your appetite, or your thought life. Maybe perseverance is hard, because you quit things when they get difficult. Maybe loving other Christians is the challenge, because some of them are annoying. Peter doesn't expect you to master all eight at once. He says to keep growing in them. Pick one, ask God for help, and take one step this week.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Nearsighted**

Peter says someone without these qualities is nearsighted. A nearsighted person can see what's right in front of them, but everything far away is blurry. Spiritual nearsightedness means focusing only on the here and now: today's drama, this weekend's plans, what everyone thinks of you right now. You lose sight of the bigger picture: who God is, what He's done for you, and where you're headed. Peter says people like that have forgotten that they've been forgiven. Remembering grace is what keeps us growing.

So, brothers and sisters, Peter says, work hard to make your calling and choosing sure. If you do these things, you'll never fall. Jesus, our Lord and Savior, will throw the doors of His never-ending kingdom wide open for you.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Make It Sure**

What does it mean to make your calling and choosing sure? Peter isn't saying that you earn your place in God's family by being good. He's saying that a growing, changing life is evidence that God's call on your life is real. Christians from different traditions understand assurance of salvation in different ways. Some emphasize that believers can be confident because of God's promises. Others emphasize that faithful perseverance is needed until the end. All agree

that a life with no growth at all is a warning sign, and that a life of growing love is a sign of God at work. If you're worried about whether you really belong to God, look to Jesus first, not to your own performance, and talk to a mature Christian about it.

Peter says he'll keep reminding them of these things, even though they already know them and are standing firm. As long as he's still living in his body, which he pictures as a tent, he thinks it's right to keep refreshing their memories, because he knows he'll soon take the tent down, as Jesus made clear to him. And he'll do his best to make sure that after he leaves, they'll still be able to remember.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Reminders**

You might think, I already know this. Why does Peter keep repeating himself? Because knowing something and remembering it when it counts are two different things. You know you should be kind to your siblings, but do you remember when they're annoying you? Peter knows that people forget, drift, and get distracted. That's why we need to keep reading the Bible, hearing it taught, and talking about it, even when we've heard it before. Repetition isn't a waste. It's how truth sinks in.

BACKGROUND CHECK **A Tent and an Exit**

Peter calls his body a tent, a temporary home that will one day be taken down (Paul uses the same picture in 2 Corinthians 5:1). And the word he uses for his departure is exodus, the same word used for the Israelites leaving Egypt. Interestingly, it's also the word Luke uses when he describes Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus at the Transfiguration about His departure, His coming death in Jerusalem (Luke 9:31). For Peter, death isn't the end. It's an exodus, a journey home.

Then Peter makes a bold claim. The apostles' message about Jesus' powerful coming, he insists, wasn't a set of clever tales. In his words, "we did not follow cleverly devised stories." They had seen Jesus' majesty for themselves. God the Father honored Him and

gave Him glory, as a voice spoke from the Majestic Glory, calling Jesus His dearly loved Son who brought Him joy. Peter says he and the others heard that voice from heaven with their own ears, on the holy mountain where they stood beside Jesus.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Transfiguration**

Peter is talking about one of the most amazing events in the Gospels (Matthew 17:1–8; Mark 9:2–8; Luke 9:28–36). Jesus took Peter, James, and John up a high mountain. There, Jesus was transformed. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became dazzling white. Moses and Elijah appeared and talked with Him. Peter, not knowing what to say, offered to build three shelters, one each for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. Then a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said that Jesus was God's Son, whom He loved, and told them to listen to Him. The disciples fell on their faces, terrified. When they looked up, they saw only Jesus. Tradition places the event on Mount Tabor in Galilee, though some think it was Mount Hermon, farther north. The NIV footnote on 1:17 points to the Gospel accounts.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Eyewitnesses**

The false teachers apparently said that the apostles' message about Jesus' power and return was a set of clever myths, the kind of stories ancient people told about gods and heroes. Peter answers: we were there. We saw it. We heard it. That's an important point. Christianity isn't based on a philosophy or a feeling. It's based on events that people claimed to have witnessed: Jesus' miracles, His death, His resurrection. The New Testament writers repeatedly say that they're reporting what they saw and heard (Luke 1:1–4; 1 John 1:1–3; 1 Corinthians 15:3–8). You can investigate their claims. You can ask whether they're reliable. But you can't say they were only trying to write inspiring fiction. They said it really happened.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Myths and Misinformation**

We live in a time when it's hard to know what's true. Deepfakes, edited videos, rumors, and conspiracy theories spread fast. Some people even say all religious claims are just myths. How can you tell the difference? Ask good

questions. Who's making this claim? Were they there? Do other sources confirm it? What do they gain from it? Were they willing to suffer for it? The apostles gained no money or power from their message. Most of them were persecuted, and many were killed. People rarely die for something they know they made up.

Peter goes on. We also have the message of the prophets, which is fully trustworthy. You'll do well to pay close attention to it, like a lamp lighting up a dark room, until dawn comes and the morning star comes up within you.

BACKGROUND CHECK **A Lamp in the Dark**

Peter compares Scripture to a lamp in a dark room. It doesn't light up everything at once, but it shows you enough to take the next step. Psalm 119:105 uses a similar picture. The morning star is the planet Venus, which shines brightly just before dawn. Revelation calls Jesus the bright morning star (Revelation 22:16). Peter seems to be saying that the Bible guides us now, in the dark, until Jesus returns and the full light of day arrives.

Then Peter says something important about where Scripture came from. First of all, understand this: no prophecy in Scripture came from the prophet's own interpretation. Prophecy never started with a human decision. Instead, "prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Not Their Own Interpretation**

Interpreters understand 1:20 in two main ways. Some think Peter is talking about where prophecy came from. The prophets didn't just make up their own ideas about the future or offer their personal opinions. Their message came from God. Others think Peter is talking about how prophecy is understood. No one should interpret Scripture privately, on their own, cut off from the teaching of the apostles and the church. The false teachers may have been twisting prophecies to suit themselves. Verse 21 seems to support

the first view, but both ideas are true and important: Scripture came from God, and we read it best together, not alone.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Carried Along**

The word Peter uses for carried along is the same word Luke uses for a ship being driven by the wind (Acts 27:15, 17). The prophets were like sailing ships, and the Holy Spirit was the wind in their sails. Notice that Peter says the prophets were still human. God didn't turn them into robots or take over their hands. They wrote with their own personalities, vocabularies, and styles. Isaiah sounds different from Jeremiah, and Paul sounds different from John. But the Spirit moved them, so that what they spoke came from God.

BACKGROUND CHECK **How Did God Inspire Scripture?**

Christians agree that the Bible is inspired by God, but they explain it in different ways. Some hold that God guided the human writers so that every word of the original texts is exactly what He intended, and is without error in everything it teaches. Others believe God inspired the writers' message and purpose, while allowing for human limitations in details of history or science, which don't affect the Bible's central teaching. Catholic and Orthodox Christians see Scripture as inspired and authoritative, and read it within the living tradition of the church. Through all these views runs a shared belief: the Bible is God's word, given through human beings, and it's trustworthy to guide us to salvation and to a life that pleases God (2 Timothy 3:15–17).

KEY VERSE

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)

REAL TALK

1. Which quality on Peter's ladder is strongest in your life? Which needs the most work?
2. How do grace and effort work together in the Christian life?
3. Why does it matter that Peter says he was an eyewitness?
4. How would you explain to a friend where the Bible came from?

TRY THIS *Copy Peter's ladder of virtues onto a card. Pick one quality to focus on this week. Each day, write down one specific thing you did to grow in it. At the end of the week, ask someone who knows you well whether they noticed a difference.*

CHAPTER 2

Spot the Fakes

2 Peter 2

Peter now turns to the danger he's most worried about. In the past, he says, there were false prophets among God's people, and in the same way false teachers will show up in your churches. They'll sneak in destructive teachings, even rejecting the Master who paid the price for them, and they'll bring quick destruction on themselves.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Sneaking In**

Peter says the false teachers will sneak their teachings in. They won't announce, Hi, I'm a false teacher. They'll sound reasonable, attractive, and spiritual. They'll mix truth with lies. That's what makes false teaching dangerous. A lie that's 90 percent true is harder to spot than an obvious one. Jesus warned that false prophets would come in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15). The best way to recognize a fake is to know the real thing really well. Bank tellers learn to spot counterfeit money by handling real money until they know exactly how it feels.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Master Who Bought Them**

Peter says these false teachers deny the Master who bought them. That phrase has been debated. Some Christians, especially in the Reformed tradition, believe Christ's death was intended specifically to save those God chose. They understand this verse to describe how the false teachers claimed to belong to Christ, or how Christ's death was in principle enough for them. Other Christians understand this verse to show that Christ died for everyone,

including people who end up rejecting Him. Either way, the tragedy is clear: these teachers turned their backs on the very One who paid for them.

Many people will follow their immoral ways, Peter says, and because of them, the true way will be dragged through the mud. Out of greed, these teachers will use made-up stories to take advantage of you. But their judgment has been on its way for a long time, and their destruction is wide awake.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Following the Money**

Peter says the false teachers were driven by greed. That's still one of the clearest warning signs. Be careful with any teacher, preacher, or influencer who seems mainly interested in your money, promises that God will make you rich if you give to them, lives in extreme luxury paid for by followers, or won't let anyone hold them accountable. Some well-known religious leaders have built empires by manipulating people. That doesn't mean every pastor who receives a salary is a fake. Paul says workers deserve their wages (1 Timothy 5:17–18). But Jesus' true servants don't exploit people.

BACKGROUND CHECK **How to Spot a False Teacher**

Based on 2 Peter 2 and other passages, here are some warning signs. They change or deny core truths about Jesus, such as that He is Lord, that He died for our sins, and that He rose and will return. They live in ways that contradict what Jesus taught, especially in money and sex. They're arrogant and won't accept correction. They promise freedom from all rules. They take advantage of new or vulnerable believers. They isolate people from family, friends, and other churches. They demand total loyalty to themselves. If you see these signs in a leader, a group, or an online personality, talk to a trusted adult. Good teachers point you to Jesus, not to themselves.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Who Borrowed from Whom?**

As Setting the Scene mentioned, much of 2 Peter 2 closely matches the short letter of Jude. Compare 2 Peter 2:1–3:3 with Jude 4–18, and you'll find the same themes, the same examples, and many of the same unusual words.

Scholars explain the connection in three main ways.

2 Peter used Jude. This is the majority view today. Jude is shorter, and it's usually easier to explain why a writer would expand a short letter than why another would shrink a longer one. Jude also quotes directly from two Jewish books outside the Old Testament: 1 Enoch (Jude 14–15) and, according to early church writers, a book called the Assumption of Moses, which seems to be the source of the story of Michael and the devil (Jude 9). Second Peter covers the same ground but leaves out those quotations and the names, perhaps because some readers questioned those books. And 2 Peter puts the examples in Old Testament order, flood before Sodom, and adds hopeful examples of rescue, Noah and Lot, which look like a writer smoothing and reshaping Jude's material.

Jude used 2 Peter. Some scholars, especially those who hold that Peter wrote the letter in the 60s, think Jude came second. They note that 2 Peter speaks of false teachers who will come, in the future tense, while Jude says they've already slipped in. And Jude tells his readers to remember what the apostles predicted, that scoffers would come in the last times (Jude 17–18), which sounds a lot like 2 Peter 3:3. Jude may be quoting Peter's warning, and pointing out that it has come true.

Both used a common source. Others suggest that both writers drew on an earlier sermon, teaching, or list of warnings about false teachers that circulated among the churches, and each adapted it in his own way. That could explain why the two letters share so much while differing in the details. Each view has thoughtful defenders, and the evidence can be read more than one way. Whichever is right, it was normal in the ancient world, and in the Bible, for writers to use and adapt earlier material; Matthew and Luke seem to have used Mark, for example. Using a source doesn't make a book less inspired. The Holy Spirit can guide a writer's research as well as his words.

Then Peter gives a series of examples from the Old Testament to prove that God judges evil and rescues the righteous. First, God didn't spare the angels who sinned. He sent them to hell, where they're held in chains of darkness until the judgment. The NIV

footnotes explain that the Greek word here is Tartarus, and that some manuscripts say they're held in gloomy dungeons.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Tartarus**

Peter uses an unusual word here: Tartarus. It doesn't appear anywhere else in the Bible. In Greek mythology, Tartarus was the deepest, darkest pit of the underworld, far below Hades, where the Titans, the gods who rebelled against Zeus, were imprisoned. Some Jewish writers before Peter's time had already used the word for the place where rebellious angels are held. Peter isn't endorsing Greek myths. He's borrowing a word his readers would understand to describe a real place of confinement for rebellious spiritual beings, much as we might use a familiar word today to explain something.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Which Angels?**

Which angels does Peter mean? Many interpreters connect this verse to the strange story in Genesis 6:1–4, where the sons of God take human wives before the flood. Some Jewish writings, especially the book of 1 Enoch, which was well known in the first century, describe these sons of God as angels who rebelled and were imprisoned until the judgment. Jude, which is closely connected to 2 Peter, mentions the same angels and actually quotes from 1 Enoch (Jude 6, 14–15). Others understand Genesis 6 differently, as describing human beings, such as the descendants of Seth marrying the descendants of Cain, or powerful kings; on that reading, Peter's angels might refer to an original rebellion of angels with Satan before human history. Either way, Peter's point is clear: if God judged even powerful angels, false teachers won't escape.

Second, God didn't hold back His judgment from the old world when He sent the flood on ungodly people. But He protected Noah, who preached righteousness, along with seven others, Noah's family.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Noah the Preacher**

Genesis doesn't record Noah preaching. But Jewish tradition remembered him as calling his generation to turn back to God while he built the ark, and Peter follows that tradition. Imagine preaching for decades and seeing no one respond except your own family. Noah kept doing what was right, even when he was alone. Sometimes faithfulness means standing firm when nobody else does.

Third, God condemned Sodom and Gomorrah, burning them to ashes, as a warning of what will happen to the ungodly. But He pulled Lot out, a good man who was deeply troubled by the immoral behavior of the people around him. Day after day, Lot lived among them, and his righteous soul was tortured by the lawless things he saw and heard.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Sodom and Gomorrah**

Genesis 18–19 tells how God destroyed these cities with burning sulfur. What was their sin? The Bible gives several answers. Genesis 19 describes the men of Sodom trying to gang-rape two visitors, a horrific act of violence. Ezekiel says Sodom was arrogant, overfed, and unconcerned, and didn't help the poor and needy (Ezekiel 16:49–50). Jude mentions sexual immorality and perversion (Jude 7). Christians discuss how these passages apply to questions of sexuality today. But all agree that Sodom stands in Scripture as a picture of a society that had become completely corrupt, violent, proud, and cruel to the vulnerable.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Righteous Lot?**

If you've read Genesis 19, you might be surprised that Peter calls Lot righteous. Lot chose to live in Sodom for its wealth. He offered his own daughters to a violent mob, a shocking act. He hesitated when the angels told him to leave. Later, he got drunk, and his daughters took advantage of him. He was far from perfect. But Peter says that deep down, Lot was troubled by the evil around him, and he trusted God. That's encouraging and sobering.

God can rescue imperfect people. But Lot's compromises cost him dearly. Living close to sin, even while hating it, takes a toll.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Tormented by What He Saw**

Peter says that Lot's soul was tormented by what he saw and heard every day. We might not live in Sodom, but we're surrounded by images and messages that can wear us down: violence, cruelty, pornography, and mockery of everything good. Sometimes we get so used to it that it stops bothering us. Peter suggests that it should bother us. Pay attention to what you're watching, scrolling, and listening to. If something leaves you feeling dirty, anxious, or numb, that's worth noticing.

So, Peter says, God is fully able to get godly people out of from their trials, and how to keep the wicked under punishment until judgment day. That's especially true of people who chase their corrupt desires and look down on authority.

BACKGROUND CHECK **God Can Get You Out**

This is the heart of chapter 2. Peter tells these stories to make two points. First, God judges evil. He did it before, and He'll do it again. Second, God rescues the righteous. Noah and Lot were outnumbered, surrounded by evil, and looked like losers. But God saw them and rescued them. If you feel outnumbered, the only Christian on your team, in your class, or in your family, God sees you. He knows how to rescue you.

These false teachers are bold and arrogant, Peter says. They aren't afraid to insult heavenly beings, even though angels, who are far stronger, don't bring insulting accusations against them before the Lord. The NIV footnote mentions that many manuscripts say in the presence of the Lord. These people insult things they don't understand. They're like wild animals with no reason, driven only by their urges, good for nothing but being trapped and killed. And like animals, they'll be destroyed.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Celestial Beings**

It's hard to know exactly what Peter means here. Celestial beings might be angels, or perhaps fallen angels and demons. The false teachers may have mocked the idea of spiritual powers or of the devil, or bragged that they had nothing to fear from them. Peter says even good angels don't speak arrogantly against evil spiritual beings, but leave judgment to God. Jude 9 gives an example: the archangel Michael, disputing with the devil, didn't insult him, but said, the Lord rebuke you. The lesson: don't treat spiritual realities lightly, and don't be arrogant.

Peter's description gets more intense. The damage they've done will come back on them. They think it's fun to party in broad daylight. They're stains and blemishes, enjoying their pleasures while they eat with you. The NIV footnote mentions that some manuscripts say in their love feasts, the shared meals of the early church. Their eyes are full of adultery, and they never stop sinning. They lure unstable people. They're experts at greed. They live under a curse.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Love Feasts**

The early Christians often ate a meal together when they gathered for worship, which came to be called the love feast. It was a time of fellowship and sharing, where rich and poor ate at the same table. Peter says the false teachers were there too, sitting at the table, looking like part of the family, while spreading poison. That's a sobering reminder: not everyone who shows up at church is safe. That's one reason churches today need safeguards, especially for young people.

They've left the straight road and gone off course, Peter says. They've followed the path of Balaam, Bezer's son, who loved getting paid for doing wrong. The NIV footnote notes that the Greek has Bosor. But Balaam got a scolding for his sin from his own donkey. A creature that has no words suddenly talked like a person and put a stop to the prophet's insanity.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Balaam and the Talking Donkey**

The story of Balaam is one of the strangest and funniest in the Bible (Numbers 22–24). Balak, the king of Moab, offered Balaam, a famous prophet-for-hire, a fortune to curse Israel. Balaam wanted the money. On his way, an angel with a drawn sword blocked the road. Balaam couldn't see it, but his donkey could. The donkey kept turning aside, and Balaam kept beating her. Finally, God let the donkey speak, and she asked Balaam why he was hitting her. Then Balaam saw the angel. In the end, Balaam could only bless Israel. But later, he advised Moab to lead Israel into sin (Numbers 31:16). Peter's point: when a donkey has more spiritual sense than a prophet, something's gone badly wrong. Greed can make even smart people blind.

These people are springs with no water, Peter says, and mist blown away by a storm. The deepest darkness is waiting for them. They speak with big, empty, boastful words. They appeal to sinful desires to lure people who have only just gotten away from a life of deception.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Springs Without Water**

Imagine hiking through the desert, desperate for a drink, and finally reaching a spring, only to find it dry. That's what false teachers are like. They promise refreshment and deliver nothing. They're like clouds that look like rain but blow away. Lots of things promise to satisfy you: popularity, money, sex, achievement, partying, followers. Some of them are good things in their proper place. But none of them can quench your deepest thirst. Jesus offers living water, and He's the only spring that never runs dry (John 4:13–14).

BACKGROUND CHECK **Targeting the New**

Notice who the false teachers target: people who are just escaping, new believers who are still finding their feet. Predators of every kind look for the vulnerable: the young, the lonely, the new, the hurting. If you're new to faith, it's wise to stay close to mature, trustworthy believers who can help you think things through. And if you've been following Jesus for a while, look out for people who are new.

They promise people freedom, Peter says, while they themselves are slaves to corruption. Then he quotes a saying: whatever controls you owns you.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Slaves of Freedom**
>
> The false teachers promised freedom: no rules, no judgment, no limits. Do whatever you want. But Peter says they were actually slaves. Think about it. A person who can't stop drinking, gaming, watching porn, scrolling, or vaping isn't free. They're controlled. The things that promise the most freedom often end up becoming masters. Jesus offers a different kind of freedom: not freedom to do whatever you want, but freedom to become who you were made to be (John 8:34–36). And if you're struggling with something that has mastered you, there's no shame in asking for help. Talk to a trusted adult, a counselor, or a doctor. Freedom is possible.

Then Peter gives a serious warning. If people have escaped the world's corruption by knowing Jesus, and then get tangled up in it again and are defeated, they end up worse off than they were before. They'd have been better off never knowing the right way than to know it and then turn their backs on the holy command they were given. He quotes two proverbs. A dog goes back to its vomit, and a pig that's been washed goes back to rolling in the mud. The first comes from Proverbs 26:11, as the NIV footnote notes.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Worse Off Than Before**
>
> This passage, like the warning passages in Hebrews, raises a hard question. Who is Peter talking about? Christians understand it in different ways. Some believe Peter is describing genuine believers who fall away and lose their salvation. Others believe he's describing people who seemed to be believers, who knew the truth and looked clean on the outside, but whose hearts never truly changed. The proverbs might support this view: the dog and the pig never stopped being a dog and a pig. Still others focus on the loss of rewards

or the damage done by turning away. All agree that knowing the truth brings responsibility, and that walking away from Jesus is serious.

BACKGROUND CHECK **If You're Afraid You've Gone Too Far**

If you're reading this and feeling scared that you've drifted too far from God, here's something important. Peter himself denied Jesus three times. Jesus restored him. The people Peter describes here are arrogant false teachers who mock God, exploit people, and have no desire to come back. If you're worried about your relationship with God, that worry is itself a sign that God is still at work in you. People who have truly turned their backs on God don't usually lie awake wondering if they have. God's door is open. Come back to Him, talk to Him honestly, and talk to a pastor or trusted Christian adult.

KEY VERSE

They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for "people are slaves to whatever has mastered them."

2 Peter 2:19 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. Why are false teachings that are mostly true more dangerous than obvious lies?
2. What warning signs would make you suspicious of a teacher, leader, or influencer?
3. What things in our culture promise freedom but end up enslaving people?
4. What does the story of Lot teach about living close to sin?

TRY THIS *Think about the voices that influence you most: online creators, musicians, friends, teachers, and leaders. Make a list. Next to each one, write whether they point you toward Jesus, away from Him, or neither. Consider*

unfollowing one voice that pulls you away, and following one that points you toward Him.

CHAPTER 3

The Patient God

2 Peter 3

Peter says this is his second letter to his readers. In both, he's tried to wake up their minds with reminders, so they'll think clearly. He wants them to remember what God's holy prophets said long ago, and what Jesus commanded through His apostles.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Second Letter**
> Which letter is Peter's first? Most think it's 1 Peter. Some suggest it's a letter that has been lost. Either way, Peter keeps returning to the theme of remembering. He mentions the prophets, representing what we call the Old Testament, and the apostles, representing the teaching that became the New Testament. Together, they're the foundation for the church's faith (Ephesians 2:20).

Most important, Peter says, know that in the last days, mockers will come, laughing at the truth and following their own desires. They'll ask what happened to Jesus' promise to come back. Since our ancestors died, they'll say, everything has stayed the same as it's been since creation began.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Scoffers**
> Mockers have always existed. In every generation, some people laugh at the idea that God will intervene in history, judge the world, and make things right. Today, you might hear: Christians have been saying Jesus is coming back for two thousand years. Science explains everything. Nothing ever changes. Peter

says the scoffers' real motive is often that they want to follow their own desires. If there's no judgment, there's no accountability. That doesn't mean everyone with questions is a scoffer. Honest questions are welcome. Scoffing is different. It's mocking without really listening.

But they deliberately ignore something, Peter says. Long ago, God spoke, and the heavens came into existence. God shaped the earth out of water and through water. And through water, that ancient world was drowned and wiped out. That same word of God is now keeping the present heavens and earth for fire, holding them until the day when ungodly people are judged and destroyed.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Nothing Ever Changes?**

The scoffers said that nothing ever changes. Peter says that's not true. God has already intervened in history in a huge way. He created the world by His word, and He judged the world in the flood. The universe isn't a closed machine running on its own. It exists because God spoke, and it continues because He holds it together (Hebrews 1:3). Peter connects water with both creation and judgment. Genesis 1 describes God separating the waters at creation, and in the flood the waters came back. Peter says the next judgment will be by fire.

Then Peter gives one of the most quoted passages in the letter. Dear friends, don't forget this one thing: "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day." The Lord isn't slow about keeping His promise, the way some people think of slowness. Instead, He's being patient with you. He doesn't want anyone to be lost. He wants everyone to turn back to Him.

BACKGROUND CHECK **A Day Like a Thousand Years**

Peter is echoing Psalm 90:4, which says that a thousand years in God's sight are like a day that has just gone by. Peter's point is that God doesn't experience time the way we do. What feels like forever to us is nothing to Him. This verse is sometimes used to argue about the age of the earth or the length

of the days in Genesis, or to calculate when Jesus will return, but that's not what Peter is doing. He's simply saying that God's timing isn't our timing. Two thousand years doesn't mean God has forgotten. It's the blink of an eye for Him.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Not Slow, but Patient**

Why hasn't Jesus come back yet? Peter's answer is beautiful: because God is patient. He's waiting for more people to turn to Him. Every day that passes before Jesus returns is another day of mercy. Think about what that means. Maybe God is waiting for you, or for someone you love. His delay isn't neglect. It's love.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Not Wanting Anyone to Perish**

Christians understand 3:9 in different ways. Many believe it shows that God sincerely wants every person to be saved, and that people have a real choice to accept or reject Him (see also 1 Timothy 2:4). Some, especially in the Reformed tradition, read you as referring to God's chosen people, or distinguish between what God desires and what He has decreed, while still affirming that God takes no pleasure in anyone's death (Ezekiel 33:11). A small number of Christians, sometimes called universalists, hope that eventually everyone will be saved, though most traditions have rejected that view, partly because of passages like this letter's warnings about judgment. All agree on what Peter emphasizes: God is patient, merciful, and wants people to turn to Him.

Then Peter writes: "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare." The NIV footnote mentions that some manuscripts say the earth will be burned up instead.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Like a Thief**

Peter borrows this picture from Jesus, who said that if a homeowner knew what time a thief was coming, he'd stay awake (Matthew 24:42–44). Paul uses

it too (1 Thessalonians 5:2). The point isn't that Jesus is like a criminal. It's that His coming will take people by surprise. No one knows the day or the hour (Matthew 24:36). Anyone who claims to have figured out the date is wrong. The right response isn't to calculate, but to be ready.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Laid Bare or Burned Up?**

The last phrase of 3:10 is one of the trickiest textual questions in the New Testament. Ancient manuscripts of 2 Peter disagree here. Some say that the earth and its works will be burned up, which is how older translations, like the King James Version, read. Others, including some of the earliest and best manuscripts, have a word that means found or discovered. The NIV translates it as laid bare, and notes the burned up reading in a footnote. If the original said laid bare, Peter may mean that on the day of the Lord, everything people have done will be exposed before God's judgment, with nothing hidden. That fits with Paul's picture of fire testing the quality of each person's work (1 Corinthians 3:13).

BACKGROUND CHECK **What Are the Elements?**

The Greek word for elements, stoicheia, can mean the basic building blocks of the physical world. In Peter's time, many thought of these as earth, air, fire, and water. It can also mean the heavenly bodies, like the sun, moon, and stars, or even spiritual powers. Peter probably means that the entire created order, as it is now, will be shaken to its foundations. He's using vivid, prophetic language, similar to Isaiah 34:4, which pictures the stars dissolving and the sky rolling up like a scroll. Christians differ on how literally to take these images, but all agree that when that day comes, everything will change.

Since everything will be dissolved like this, Peter asks, what kind of people should you be? Your lives should be holy and devoted to God, as you wait in hope for God's day and hurry it along. The NIV footnote offers another way to read that phrase: as you wait eagerly for the day of God to come. That day will set the heavens on fire and end them, and its heat will melt the elements. But God has made a

promise, and so we're eagerly waiting for a new sky and a new world, where right living is at home.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Speeding the Day?**

How can we speed up the day of God? Peter doesn't explain, but other passages give clues. Peter told a crowd in Jerusalem to repent so that times of refreshing might come and God might send Jesus (Acts 3:19–20). Jesus said the gospel would be preached to all nations, and then the end would come (Matthew 24:14). He also taught us to pray for God's kingdom to come (Matthew 6:10). So praying, sharing the good news, and living holy lives may all be ways we take part in God's plan. As the footnote notes, the phrase can also be translated as waiting eagerly, so Peter may simply be describing how much believers long for that day.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Destroyed or Renewed?**

Will God destroy the universe and start over, or will He purify and renew it? Christians hold different views. Some read 3:10–12 as describing a complete destruction of the present universe, followed by a brand-new creation. Others point out that Peter compares the coming fire with the flood, which didn't annihilate the earth, but cleansed it. They connect this passage with Romans 8:19–21, where Paul says creation itself will be set free from decay, and with Revelation 21:5, where God says He's making all things new, not making all new things. In this view, the fire refines and purifies, like a smelter's fire, and the laid bare reading would fit. Both views agree that God will judge evil, that the world as we know it will be radically transformed, and that the future is a real, physical new creation, not just floating on clouds forever.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Does It Matter How We Treat the Earth?**

If the world is going to burn anyway, why care about the environment? Christians who hold both views often answer that God made the world and called it good (Genesis 1:31), and gave humans the job of caring for it (Genesis 2:15). How we treat God's creation shows how we feel about the Creator. Even if a house will be renovated someday, you don't trash it while you're living in it. And if God plans to renew creation, our care for it now is a small preview of

His plans. Christians disagree about specific environmental policies, but most agree that caring for creation is part of honoring God.

BACKGROUND CHECK **New Heavens and a New Earth**

Peter's hope isn't escaping to heaven as a ghost. It's a new creation, heavens and earth made new, a renewed, physical world where everything is right. This promise comes from Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22, and Revelation describes it in breathtaking detail: God living with His people, no more death, no more crying, no more pain (Revelation 21:1–4). Imagine a world with no injustice, no abuse, no sickness, no loneliness, no war. That's where history is headed. And Peter says that knowing this should change how we live now.

So, dear friends, Peter says, since you're waiting for these things, do everything you can to be found by Him without stain or fault, at peace with Him. Remember that our Lord's patience means people are being saved, which is what Paul, our beloved brother, also wrote to you, with the wisdom God gave him. Paul writes about these things in all his letters. "His letters contain some things that are hard to understand," which ignorant and unstable people twist, just as they twist the rest of Scripture, leading to their own destruction.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Our Dear Brother Paul**

Remember the story from Galatians 2? Paul once confronted Peter publicly for hypocrisy, for pulling away from Gentile believers when some Jewish Christians showed up. That must have been humiliating. But here, Peter calls Paul our dear brother and praises his wisdom. There's no grudge. That's what reconciliation looks like among people who love Jesus. If someone has corrected you, even embarrassingly, can you thank them later?

BACKGROUND CHECK **Hard to Understand**

This is one of the most reassuring verses in the Bible. Even Peter, an apostle who walked with Jesus, found some of Paul's writing hard to understand! If you've ever read Romans and thought, what is he talking about?, you're in good company. The Bible isn't always easy. Some parts are clear and simple.

Others take careful study, patience, and help from others. That's okay. Peter's warning isn't against struggling with hard passages. It's against twisting them to say what you want them to say. Approach hard passages with humility, ask questions, read them in context, and get help from people who know more than you.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Paul's Letters as Scripture**

Peter says that unstable people twist Paul's letters, the same way they twist the rest of Scripture. That's remarkable. It's one of the earliest places where a New Testament writer refers to other New Testament writings as Scripture, placing them alongside the Old Testament. (Another is 1 Timothy 5:18, which quotes Jesus' words, also found in Luke 10:7, alongside Deuteronomy, calling both Scripture.) It shows that very early on, Christians recognized that the apostles' writings carried God's authority. Scholars who date 2 Peter later see this as evidence of a time when Paul's letters had been collected. Those who date it earlier point out that Paul's letters were read and shared among churches during his lifetime.

So, dear friends, since you've been warned ahead of time, be on guard. Don't let lawless people's errors sweep you off your feet, so that you lose your firm footing. Instead, keep growing in grace, and in knowing Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Glory belongs to Him, now and forever! Amen.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Grow**

Peter's last word, possibly the last thing he ever wrote, is grow. Not just believe. Not just know. Grow. Growth is gradual. You don't notice a plant growing by staring at it. But over weeks and months, the change is obvious. Spiritual growth is the same. Keep praying, reading, worshiping, serving, and spending time with other believers, and over time, you'll grow. Notice also that Peter's final words of praise are directed to Jesus: glory to Him forever. Peter ends his life the way he began his ministry, pointing to Jesus.

BACKGROUND CHECK **From Rock to Rock**

Think about Peter's journey. A loud, impulsive fisherman who sank in the waves, rebuked Jesus, cut off a man's ear, and denied Jesus three times. And the same man became a rock, a leader, a shepherd, and finally, according to tradition, a martyr. His last letter tells others to keep growing. That's what grace does. It doesn't leave you the way it found you. Whatever your story, Jesus isn't finished with you.

KEY VERSE

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

2 Peter 3:9 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think some people mock the idea that Jesus will return?
2. How does it change your view of God to know that His delay is patience?
3. Do you think the world will be destroyed or renewed? Why? How does that affect how you live?
4. Which parts of the Bible do you find hardest to understand? Who could help you with them?

TRY THIS *Think of one person you know who doesn't follow Jesus. Since God is patient and wants them to turn to Him, pray for them by name every day this week. Then look for one way to show them kindness, or to share a little of why you believe.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Now What? The Bottom Line

You've just read 2 Peter, a letter about the truth, about a patient God, and about a promise that Jesus will come back. Peter says God is patient because He doesn't want anyone to perish. That includes you.

Here's what the Bible says, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He loves you more than you can imagine. He wants you to know Him.

> *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (NIV)**

2 We've all turned away.

We've all gone our own way instead of God's. The Bible calls it sin, and it separates us from God.

> *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,* **Romans 3:23 (NIV)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is good, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says the result of sin is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (NIV)**

4 Jesus came for you.

Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose again. He didn't wait for us to get our lives together first.

> *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* **Romans 5:8 (NIV)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

Salvation isn't a reward for being good enough. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.* **Ephesians 2:8–9 (NIV)**

6 Turn and trust.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. God is patient, but don't put it off forever.

> *If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* **Romans 10:9 (NIV)**

So what do you do with that? You don't need perfect words. You can talk to God honestly, right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

> *God, I've been running my own life, and I've sinned against You. I can't fix that myself. Thank You for being patient with me. Thank You that Jesus died for me and rose again. I believe You raised Him from the dead. I'm turning to You. Forgive me. I trust Jesus as my Savior,*

and I want to follow Him as my King. Help me grow, keep me in the truth, and make me ready for the day He comes back. In Jesus' name, amen.

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read 2 Peter straight through. Then read 1 John, the next letter in the New Testament, which is all about knowing you belong to God.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized.

Keep growing. Peter's last words were to grow in grace and in knowing Jesus. Talk to God every day, and keep reading His word.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Keep asking. Keep reading. Peter says God is patient. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if Peter is right, the Jesus he saw shining on the mountain is coming back, and He's waiting for you with open arms.

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

2 Peter 3:18 (NIV)