

Trials From Within — 2 Peter

1. Greetings, Grace and Peace 2 Peter 1:1-4

2 Peter 1:1 Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ: 2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; 3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. 4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

The continuity of the Christian life and relationships is wonderful. Peter understood his relationship with Jesus and knew that he was a bond-servant by his choice and an apostle by His. Then he included the recipients of his letter as those who have received the same kind of faith as his. That would be apostolic faith. That is miracle working, healing imparting, circumstance altering faith. I don't think that regular, everyday sorts of believers often think of possessing **that** kind of faith. Peter said that we do. He said that it is imparted by the righteousness of Jesus. Then he added grace and peace being multiplied in the knowledge of God and Jesus, whose divine power has granted us everything pertaining to life and godliness.

That's right, Jesus has released the power that has granted us everything we could possibly need to live and to live godly. This comes via the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.

This is an amazing salutation. The reality of God's presence and out-pouring in our lives is indescribable. We are equipped and set up to live in constant victory and hope while being aware of God working in and through us to do His will. We are provided with all the resources we need to fulfill His calling in our lives. We can do everything He asks us to do because He has put the resources in us.

Do you have days when you don't feel so well equipped? If you sink into self-awareness you can drift into defeat and discouragement. Everything God has given you is flowing out of Him and His strength is eternal. Remember the night when Peter let his faith run wild and he stepped out of the boat in the middle of the sea and began walking toward Jesus who was walking on the water? As long as Peter had his eyes on Jesus he did fine. But he suddenly looked down even as he thought about what he was doing. He immediately came under the rule of natural law, and gravity took him down. Peter knew about God's power vs. his own.

He went on in his greeting to declare that by grace, mercy and power God has granted to us precious and magnificent promises. These promises enable us to partake of God's nature even while escaping the corruption in the world by lust. Peter didn't list the promises here, but I will take the liberty to guess that he may have been referring to Jesus' "7 I Am's". Each of them is a promise and as we believe Jesus we certainly partake of Him and thus God. Further, these aspects of Jesus will bring us out of the lust and corruption of the world. So here they are:

John 6:35 Jesus said to them, "**I am the bread of life**; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst."

John 8:12 Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "**I am the Light of the world**; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."

John 10:9 "**I am the door**; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture."

John 10:11 "**I am the good shepherd**; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep."

John 11:25 Jesus said to her, "**I am the resurrection and the life**; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "**I am the way, and the truth, and the life**; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

John 15:5 "**I am the vine**, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."

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2. What to Bring to the Table

2 Peter 1:5-9

2 Peter 1:5 Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, 6 and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, 7 and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins.

Please read the first four verses of 1 Peter 1 to remind yourself of the backdrop for today's teaching. God's marvelous outpouring of Himself to the point of making you a sharer in His nature is the reason for your expected response. And your response should be passionate and intense.

When he said, "Applying all diligence," he said to hastily make haste. Hurriedly hurry. This is no time for nonchalance or lukewarmness, instead, "With all the fervor you can muster start responding to God." You are going to bring personal qualities into life that are all built on the faith that God gave you. You are going to get busy building character in yourself that will accomplish much as you live for God, standing against the spiritual attacks that will happen. The church is going to be assaulted by false people who will infiltrate, divide and destroy if they can get away with it. They will be self-seeking, rebellious pagans who want to corrupt the grace of God and do things for their own end, not His glory. When the onslaught occurs you will be glad that you hastily made haste to be prepared and strong in Jesus.

The first thing to provide is moral excellence. A holy, pristine heart and life that has no compromise with any hint of immorality. What you see, what you think, what you do is all free of lust and sexual impurity. Jesus will empower you to do this, but you must ruthlessly put out of your life anything that will even tempt you.

To that add knowledge. Study your Bible, spend much intimate time with Jesus, who is the Truth. Do a lot of good reading as you fill your inner-man with the sweetness of Christ.

Then, some self-control. Surrender to the Holy Spirit and let Him establish boundaries in your life. Mental, emotional, social, financial . . . every area under His control and yours as you cooperate with His will.

Perseverance is next and it speaks of being faithful while enduring great pressure. Abiding under the stress of life's difficulties clear to the end and the place of victory.

And don't forget godliness (God likeness). It's possible to cultivate this list so on your own that God is left out. You then become harsh and like the clanging cymbal of 1 Corinthians 13. Stay in touch with God. He can develop these traits in you without pride or attitude, and when you express them in a godly way people will be blessed.

Brotherly kindness fits right in here. Your personal matters are addressed, you are in close fellowship with God, your heart is tender and compassionate and you can treat fellow believers with great kindness and patience. You can unconditionally accept them even if they don't yet measure up to your standards or accomplishments because you know that God is doing the work in them and all will be well.

Love is the capstone of the whole thing. God love flowing into your being and life and then back to Him and out to people around you. The patience, kindness and care that make up God love never fail.

So if you work on these things and cultivate them in your life, you will be useful and fruitful in the knowledge of Christ, instead of blind or short sighted about the things of God.

That is certainly the place to be, both in just everyday life and in the time of conflict when you have to stand firm. You can do this!

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3. Just Making Sure
2 Peter 1:10,11

2 Peter 1:10 *Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; 11 for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.*

There is nothing like solid assurance of your salvation to give you stability when trials pop up. I think that Peter had some strong personal experience in this area. He sometimes jumped out ahead of his faith and collapsed. He eventually learned that total trust in Jesus plus or minus nothing was the only sure foundation in the shifting sands of life.

So he encouraged his readers to hastily make haste (be diligent) in making sure that God had really chosen and called them to Himself. You might take his statement as trying to produce doubt, but that's not it. He was pointing out the character qualities that a believer should manifest and the fact that they cannot be conjured up by human effort. He meant that you should be adding these traits to your faith and if you aren't doing it you might want to consider the legitimacy of your salvation.

It's rather similar to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5-7. In various parables and metaphors, Jesus contrasted religion from relationship and salvation from lostness based on different tests. Tests like, "What kind of fruit does your life produce?" Or, "What kind of foundation have you built your house on?" The bottom line with Peter was that when you've completed your evaluation, you will be solid and never stumble.

Of course, if in the process of evaluation you find that fruit is lacking, or the qualities are missing, you may need to ask God if your presumed relationship with Him is actual. If you examine your spiritual life and discover that there is no fruit you may need to come to Jesus for salvation. Up until now your testimony may rest on a childhood event (like a prayer in some setting, or someone's comment about you) that now seems questionable. If you have any doubt about your faith in Jesus as your Savior and Lord it is totally appropriate to tell Him that and then pray a prayer of genuine faith in Him and come away with positive assurance that you are saved.

When you are really a Christian you can really live the Christian life because the Christ is in you and He can do it all. This means that you will practice the things that you supplied and that means that you will never stumble and furthermore entrance into the eternal Kingdom will be abundantly supplied to you. You won't just barely get in — you will come in with a lavish entrance. It will be a huge coronation day when Jesus is revealed and you right next to Him.

You know, this is a point where a huge number of professing Christians seem to veer off course. The attitude is something like "I'm saved from sin and hell now, so I'll just coast along pretty much lukewarm and just getting by. If I can find the time for what God is doing and if I feel like it, maybe I'll get involved. But don't get too excited, I've got a lot of other stuff going on and it just may be more important."

Jesus said to seek God's righteousness and His kingdom first, Paul said to set the focus of your mind and the feelings of your emotions on things above, not on things on the earth. Peter said that since everything is going to burn, we ought to be passionate people, longing for the day of the Lord. John said that we have no business loving or living according to the value system of the world and its desires. We are a called out people, set apart for God's exclusive use, and we must live in a way that brings us abundantly into His kingdom.

We just can't get too passionate for God and His Kingdom. Our giving, serving, witnessing, praying, fellowshiping, Bible study . . . everything should reflect that God is absolutely first in our lives and His work is what we value above all else. Is this costly? Of course — we may have to give some things or a lot of things up. Is it worth it? You'll be able to tell me on the day you are revealed with Jesus and escorted into His eternal Kingdom.

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4. The Importance of a Good Memory

2 Peter 1:12-15

***2 Peter 1:12** Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you. **13** I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, **14** knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. **15** And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you will be able to call these things to mind.*

Peter's teaching flowed out of his personal experiences with Jesus. He had a rather tempestuous relationship with Him, driven by his impetuous reaction to different things. Remember the night he jumped out of the boat to join Jesus who was walking on the water. Peter had several moments of success before it dawned on him that he was walking on water. In that instant he looked away from Jesus and began to sink.

On the mountain where Jesus was transfigured and accompanied by Moses and Elijah, Peter spoke out about putting up three altars and God rebuked him in that Jesus alone should be worshiped. Of course, just a few days earlier Jesus had rebuked him for his talk against the cross and Jesus' death.

On the night of Jesus' arrest, Peter denied Him three times, ultimately with cursing. He didn't have a chance to speak with Jesus again before His crucifixion. But when Jesus resurrected He left specific word at the tomb to get Peter. Jesus didn't reject him and at breakfast on the sea shore with all the disciples Jesus asked him three times to affirm his love. Jesus then told him how he would die and Peter asked, "What about him (John)?" Jesus' terse reply was, "If he is still alive when I return, what's that to you? You follow Me!"

Well, Peter recovered, got filled with the Holy Spirit and boldly proclaimed the Gospel on the birthday of the Church. His preaching resulted in thousands being saved on that Day of Pentecost and then Gentiles being brought into the Church as recorded in Acts 10.

Now he addressed these first century believers with an urgency that indicated the gravity of his writing. He was most concerned that they understood their role in expressing God's Kingdom through holy living. So he emphasized having a good memory. He knew that if they were to be established (solidly anchored) in the truth, they needed to stand on what they had been taught and not forget a word of it.

It is so easy to forget valuable truths. Some people just keep learning new things without retaining much and have a shallow life to prove it. It is vital to store up the Word of God and the truths in it so that you can respond to life situations properly. Truths like the immensity of God, the love of God, the faithfulness of God, the holiness of God, the purpose of God, then, the person of Christ, the work of Christ, the indwelling Christ . . . I could go on for pages. Oh, and please don't forget the Holy Spirit and all that He does every moment.

Peter's concern was the imminence of his death. He wanted to remind the people of everything in a way that they would remember long after he went to heaven. I share that focus and for that reason constantly provide note sheets so you can fill note books with teachings that you can review and then pass along to others. Keeping what you are taught in mind is a large part of achieving success in the Christian life.

In the next section of Peter's letter he presents the authority for the Word of God and his ministry of it. Then he will move into the big issue of the second letter — dealing with false prophets.

This is a perfect time to re-read both of his letters and let God stir your heart up with renewed passion to be and do all that He has planned for you. Review the components of your Christian life that you are to add to the faith that God has given you. Fan the fire of diligence (hastily making haste) in your heart as you get more extreme for Kingdom matters.

The day we stand together in His presence these things will matter more than anything else. Let's be ready!

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5. The Authoritative Word

2 Peter 1:16-21

2 Peter 1:16 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. 17 For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased" — 18 and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. 19 So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. 20 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, 21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

"Trials from within" refers primarily to attacks on leadership or sound teaching by people who are divisive and heretical. There are always people around who out of selfish ambition seek a following for the purpose of distracting the church from its assignment. They would rather quibble over words or style – all matters of preference – than submit to the Word of God and the leadership that God has put in place. The premise for liquidating their nonsense is true authority and that starts with the Word of God. And it's not the Word of God "insofar as it is correctly interpreted", it's the authoritative, self-interpreted Word that shuts the mouths of fools. Peter established such a Word in this text and provided proofs for its authority.

His opening claim was that his teaching on the power and coming of Jesus was not made up. He was an eyewitness of all that he ever described of Jesus' majesty. He referred to his personal experience on the mountain with Jesus the day He was transfigured and joined by Moses and Elijah. Peter made a mistake that day when he suggested building an altar to each of the three. God the Father spoke, "This is My Beloved Son with whom I am well pleased, listen to Him!" That was both a rebuke and a great declaration. Peter was there and said so, offering proof that his teaching was accurate and authoritative.

From that premise of reality Peter went on to declare that the balance of his teaching — the prophetic word — was a sure word, deserving full attention as it shone like a light illuminating their hearts. His expectation in the impact of the word was that eventually the day would dawn and the morning star arise in their hearts.

He wanted then to underscore the validity and authority of the prophetic word by emphasizing that on Scripture can be interpreted on the whim of an individual who might isolate it and read something into or out of it. Why? Because no prophecy ever was made by an act of human will, but by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Man did not write biblical prophecy, God did! He did it through men who were "borne along" by the Holy Spirit as He gave them the words to write.

Inspiration was not dictation. That is obvious by the divergent styles of writing observable in the various books of the Bible. But inspiration gave parameters guaranteeing that the writing was complete, accurate, and revealed the words of God. This means that the Bible is a supernatural book, given to man by God. It's not made up, contrived, self-serving or mythological. Rather, it is the expressly specific revelation of God Himself, free of error, preserved for all generations, living and active, and absolutely authoritative for all matters of life, faith, and practice.

It's not available for people to use in inventing religions, philosophies or societies that come from their own imagination. It is to be interpreted by itself, meaning that any interpretation of any Scripture must agree with all of the rest of Scripture. This makes its authority self-protecting and guarantees that people can know the meaning God intended and then submit to it.

It is imperative to understand and stand on the authority of Scripture in ministry and church life. Obstinates, critics, heretics, inciters of conflict and such people need to be silenced by an authoritative word. Receptive people need to see God build their lives on the word and then pass it on to others who need the truth in their lives. It is always a great opportunity to walk with God and enjoy Him.

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6. False Teachers Among Us
2 Peter 2:1-3

2 Peter 2:1 *But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. 2 Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; 3 and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.*

Remember that 2nd Peter talks about problems that arise within the Church. People and events that can come against faith, hope, love, and progress. Peter taught principles that would enable believers to avoid being defeated by these things. Sadly, not everyone received the teaching and many were led astray. Things haven't changed since then and even today people are blinded by lies and false teaching. But we can't settle for that or sit back and surmise that since people have been seduced since the fall of Adam it's just normal. No, just as the Good Shepherd laid down His life for the sheep, we must do all within our power to rescue the one who is being taken captive. Our verses today provide an introduction to false prophets that greatly helps in identifying them and their tactics.

Note that they arise among the believers. Some may be believers themselves — Peter did say that "the Master bought them". No if they are actually born again, they can't lose their salvation. Why a Christian would become a false teacher is somewhat perplexing, especially considering the scope of their activity and influence.'

These infiltrators introduce destructive heresies. A heresy is a teaching that is calculated to cause division. These types love to ask meritless questions that merely engender conflict and in the last analysis don't matter a lick. Often they gather information to support one viewpoint or another that seems highly intellectual and they try to present it with authority. They come against the leadership of the Church and undermine the direction that God has in place.

Along with the heretical talk comes a denial of Christ. A few years ago I received a mailing from a man and his wife who suddenly decided that Jesus was not God, nor did He intend for people to believe that He was. The voluminous presentation went through dozens of verses to prove their erroneous point. The sickening denial of and attack on Jesus called for swift and severe action by those in proximity to these people. But again, they had taken the intellectual ("the Greek says . . .") approach which intended to exalt them and abase the Savior. I wish that they had sent a follow-up mailing indicating repentance. Swift destruction may be in the offing.

Sensuality is the next mark of these dividers. How they love to assemble a following via some sort of experience that gratifies the flesh rather than promoting life in the Spirit. Their self-centeredness and rebellion against the Lordship of Christ opens the door to bringing the immoral conduct of pagans into the Church, and they are shameless about it. They are willing to use any human appetite to accomplish their goal as they take the very gifts of God and corrupt them into destructive tools of conflict.

They braid their elements together in a way that maligns the way of truth. Their pursuit of lust and sinful satisfaction makes them haters of Jesus, the Cross, the Christ life and surrender to Him. They have an agenda that at first is hidden. Soon enough they out themselves and greedily exploit unsuspecting people with false words. Greed is their motive as they relentlessly pursue status and power at the expense of innocent sheep who lack sufficient discernment to counter the onslaught.

Peter stressed that their judgment is coming, it's not idle or asleep, in fact it will swiftly come upon them. That's good because these attacks are a great distraction that cripples the progress of God's Kingdom, discourages the weak, and hinders the harvest. Lost people become aware of the conflict when it happens, and think twice about coming to Christ.

Please anchor your life in the Word, compare the life of those who try to influence you with it, and be strong!

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7. The Lord Knows How

2 Peter 2:4-10a

2 Peter 2:4 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment; 5 and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; 6 and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter; 7 and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men 8 (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds), 9 then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, 10 and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority.

God knows how to do things right and how to do the right thing. He knows when and how to judge sinful angels. He knows how to impose terminal judgment on wicked sinners, yet bring eight faithful people out alive and well. He knows how to deal with the rebellion, filthiness and debauchery of Sodom and Gomorrah, but deliver a righteous (though disobedient) man from the inferno. Peter wants us to know that these truths prove His capability to rescue a saint from temptation while executing appropriate and final judgment on people who choose unrighteousness.

This whole paragraph is focused on the false prophets who he warned would attempt havoc on the church. Peter speaks to reassure everyone that they won't succeed or get away with their would-be pernicious attack.

It's interesting that he included Lot in the teaching because he was a man who intentionally lived with the threat of evil taking him down. He pitched his tent toward Sodom upon parting ways with his Uncle Abraham. The next thing he knew, he was living in Sodom and that tormented his righteous soul day and night. Yet God spared him and his family (other than his wife who had to look back at Sodom and turned to a pillar salt), bringing them out untouched by the brimstone of judgment. It would have been so much better for Lot had he never gone near the wicked city. He should have lived a life of separation from the sin and unto God. The dabbling cost him his wife and morality, though his life was spared.

God promised through Paul's letter to the Corinthians:

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. **1 Corinthians 10:13**

Notice how God protects His child. He carefully regulates temptation so that it doesn't exceed the ability of the person to cope. Then He provides a way of escape so that victory is assured. Lot's deliverance is proof that He knows how to do things right.

Peter knew all of this first hand. Jesus told him that satan had come demanding permission to sift him like wheat. Jesus said that He had prayed for Peter and when he had repented he should come and strengthen his brethren. Part of Peter's victory would be temporary defeat. "Peter, before the rooster can crow twice, you're going to deny me three times," Jesus said. But that wouldn't be the end. No, Peter would crash and burn, only to rise out of the wreckage with renewed commitment.

His big moment would come on Pentecost when, under the power and filling of the Spirit, he preached to where 3,000 people were saved on the spot! He certainly endured his temptation.

Guess what? You can make it too. You may face repeated pressure to turn away from Jesus, but He will hold you, sustain you, and strengthen you to the end. Rejoice in your freedom!

Trials From Within — 2 Peter

8. Beware Apostates!

2 Peter 2:10b-22

2 Peter 2:10 Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties, 11 whereas angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord. 12 But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed, 13 suffering wrong as the wages of doing wrong. They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you, 14 having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children; 15 forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; 16 but he received a rebuke for his own transgression, for a mute donkey, speaking with a voice of a man, restrained the madness of the prophet. 17 These are springs without water and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been reserved. 18 For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, 19 promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved. 20 For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. 21 For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. 22 It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A dog returns to its own vomit," and, "A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire."

An apostate is a fake Christian who tries and often succeeds in wreaking havoc on a local church. These people are not truly believers in Jesus, but put on a show as if they are and deceive many people. The one-chapter Book of Jude is a parallel to our 2 Peter text and you should read it several times along with this scripture. You can easily note the traits of one of these individuals. They are given to grumbling, fault-finding, rebellion, sensuality, self-aggrandizement, deception, reveling in evil, rejecting authority, and the like. Why are people like this?

The root cause is their disrespect of the blood of Jesus. Jude says that ***they have gone in the way of Cain***. His way was to deny the blood sacrifice that God prescribed and Abel produced. In his arrogance Cain brought his vegetable and fruit produce. God rejected his rebellious act and he was furious. So angry that he killed his obedient brother and then intended to go on as if nothing had happened. He was never a believer.

Jude goes on to say that ***they have rushed headlong in the error of Balaam***. Balaam was a false prophet who was adaptable to the religious system of any nation. When King Balak of Moab felt the threat of the Israelites, he called for Balaam to come and curse them. Some are confused when he talks with Jehovah God and God to him. Don't be fooled — that's what apostates do. They put on an act as if they are part of God's people, but they are not. God told him what he could and couldn't do and he headed off to Moab because of the financial reward Balak had given him. God sent a flaming angel to warn him and his donkey saw it when he didn't. In fear the donkey crushed Balaam's leg on a retaining wall and Balaam beat him. The ensuing conversation between the two is humorous in a way, but very serious. Balaam tried to curse the Israelites and couldn't. Balak even had him set up his venue from a place where he could only see part of the camp. He still couldn't curse them. Why was he willing to try? Because the blood sacrifice that set God's people apart meant nothing to this sorry apostate. The worse news is that when he couldn't curse them out-right, he stuck around and taught them to inter-marry with the Moabites, worship pagan gods, and rebel against Jehovah-God.

Jude also mentioned Korah in his examples of apostates. Korah rejected the God-chosen leadership in Israel and led a bunch of people in rebellion against Moses and Aaron. It's always the same blood sacrifice that covers and conveys the work of God. People who come against God's leaders make a great mistake. Korah and the 250 leaders who joined his coup and their families were swallowed alive as the earth opened and claimed their lives.

All along apostates work in two ways. 1. Rebellion. 2. Sensuality. They love to destroy the leaders God has raised up. They love to draw unsuspecting people into their web. Sensuality is one of there powerful tools. Jude said that they turn the grace of God into sensuality. The pleasure connected with it deceives otherwise good people.

You need to take Peter and Jude very seriously as you navigate your life. Apostates are at work and will do their best to do as much damage as possible. Jude said in 20 & 21, "But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life." Please do it!

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9. God's Great Patience

2 Peter 3:1-9

2 Peter 3:1 *This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, 2 that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles. 3 Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, 4 and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." 5 For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, 6 through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. 7 But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. 8 But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. 9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.*

Recall that Peter's second letter is concerned with challenges to faith that arise within the church. He concluded chapter two with teaching on false prophets and teachers. Now he begins chapter 3 by responding to mockers who attack the truth regarding Jesus' return.

They contend that since so much time has passed since Jesus promised to return, and He has not come back yet, He isn't coming back. I have personally heard that argument and it seems to make a little more sense now than it would have at 100 AD. But Peter came against the whole concept. He pointed out that this sort of false reasoning is rooted in lustful living. A person who is committed to living after the lusts of the flesh is also eager to eliminate any thought of accountability to God or the returning Christ.

The opposite is also true. *1 John 3:1 See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. 3 And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.*

The hope of Jesus' return and our conformity to Him when He is revealed motivates a pure life. This motivation comes strongly against lustful, immoral living.

Peter answered the mockers' words with a few key reminders. **First**, the Word of God is in control. God created the world out of water and by water and destroyed most of life with water. **Second**, the world is now being reserved for judgment by fire and when the judgment falls ungodly men will be destroyed. **Third**, don't get confused about time. To God a day and a thousand years are interchangeable, so to Him a few thousand years may be just a few days. **Fourth**, any delay is actually proof of God's great patience with people, and He is holding on to give more opportunity for folks to be saved. God is not eagerly anticipating His day of judgment. He loves the people He has created and wants them all to come to repentance.

The correct outlook and Jesus' return starts with the imminence of the Rapture (catching away). This is the next event on God's prophetic calendar and everything is in place for it to happen at any second. It is described in 1 Corinthians 15:51-58. A "mystery" means that it is previously unrevealed truth. It pertains only to the church and is the bridegroom (Jesus) coming for His bride which He will catch up off the earth to meet Him in the cloud. Read more details about it in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

Following the Rapture, the earth will plunge into seven years of God's unrestrained judgment. This Tribulation Period will sort everything out and yield a believing nation of Israel that we move into Jesus' Kingdom — His 1000 year reign with a rod of iron from His throne on the Mount of Olives. His Second Coming will conclude the Tribulation and launch the Kingdom.

The Church will come with Him to earth from heaven and rule and reign with Him for the 1000 years.

This is unspeakable hope and never to be mocked or questioned, but embraced and believed!

Trials From Within — 2 Peter

10. The Day of the Lord

2 Peter 3:10 - 18

2 Peter 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. **11** Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, **12** looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! **13** But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. **14** Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, **15** and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, **16** as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. **17** You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, **18** but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Peter's succinct description of the Day of the Lord focuses on the very last of it. The Day begins with the Rapture of the church, an event that certainly will come like an unexpected thief to non-believers. There will be no surprise for a born again person who is expecting Jesus to return at any moment. Paul told the Thessalonians **1 Thessalonians 5:4** that the day would not overtake them like a thief. Anyway, the Day of the Lord includes the Rapture, the Tribulation Period, the Second Coming of Christ, the Millennial Reign of Christ on the earth, then the destruction and re-creation of the universe.

God will destroy everything He created with the fire Peter describes. Apparently Jesus will stop holding everything together **Colossians 1:17** and the result will be an unprecedented nuclear meltdown that will completely annihilate everything. Peter's question — "This being true, what sort of persons should we be?" Answer — people who live holy and godly lives while always looking for the Day of the Lord with eager expectation. His encouragement is to look at everything in the natural with the constant awareness that it's going to burn. No matter what it cost, or how nice it is, or how much work it took to get it . . . it all ends the same way — up in smoke.

Our hope is in verse 13. We are looking for a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. No more fallen world with its pain and disappointment. No more infestation of evil in and around us, instead the glory of God, His perfection, and everyone's pleasure in Him and what He has done.

This promise calls for diligence in life. We want to be found by Him in peace, without sin, and blameless. We wouldn't want to be ashamed before Him when He calls us out **1 John 2:28,29** but faithful and obedient to His glory.

That background question seems to always be there — "Why has so much time gone by without Jesus coming back?" Peter said it's because God is being patient on behalf of people who don't know Him or can't quite get it right. God's timing is never a mistake and He is always doing so many things that we are unaware of. So we trust and stay focused, always alert to the attack of rebellious, unbelieving people. Remember, there are always people willing to distort the truth and they'll take anyone down that they can.

The best defense is a good offense. Don't sit idly around waiting for something to happen. Rather, increase in your knowledge and experience of grace and the Lord Jesus. You know that grace IS Jesus and it super-abundantly supplies you with all you need to live for God. He has put the supply in place, it's up to you to partake of it and to exercise yourself unto godliness. It is critical to spend significant amounts of time with Jesus every day. Read His Word, meditate on it and live it out by His power.

Then pay attention. Watch people who distract from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ **2 Corinthians 11:3**. Some have a personal agenda that they put ahead of Jesus and His body, the church. They don't mind attacking and defaming and dividing. Invest yourself in growing in Christ and urge others to do the same. Trials from within are painful and disheartening if you leave yourself vulnerable. But if you are aware and alert and you stay on offense your life will bring glory to God for time and eternity. Isn't victory sweet?