

Prophecy *and* Scripture



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isa. 53:1–12; Dan. 7:13, 14; 2 Pet. 1:16–20; Matt. 17:1–6; 2 Tim. 3:15–17.*

Memory Text: “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:19).

As we continue to study the letters of Peter, one point should stand out: how confident and how certain Peter is in what he is writing. We can see the same with Paul: clear and firm conviction about what they are proclaiming in regard to Jesus Christ and the Cross.

In the texts for this week, we will see more of this certainty in Peter. And he even tells us why he has such certainty. We don't believe, he said, “cunningly devised fables” (2 Pet. 1:16)—such as those that comprised the pagan religions of their time. Instead, Peter was sure of what he believed in, for two reasons.

First, he was an eyewitness to “our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:8). But second, and perhaps even more important (because almost everyone else will not be an eyewitness), is the “sure word of prophecy” (2 Pet. 1:19). Peter again goes back to the Bible, pointing to the Scriptures for the certain affirmation of Jesus, especially the prophetic sections that talked about Him. No doubt these are some of the same sections that Jesus referred to regarding Himself (*Matt. 26:54, Luke 24:27*). So if Jesus and Peter took the Bible this seriously, how dare we do otherwise ourselves?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 3.

Jesus in the Old Testament

All through his epistles, Peter writes with a sense of certainty. He knows *what* he is talking about because he knows *whom* he is talking about. And one reason is that he knows that Jesus was the One to whom the Old Testament prophets pointed. It was Peter's trust in the Written Word that helped him know the Word "made flesh" (*John 1:14*).

In 1 Peter 1:10–12, Peter points his readers to the Hebrew Bible, to the prophets of old, and what they taught about Jesus. According to Peter, the Holy Spirit revealed in the Old Testament two crucial truths about Jesus: the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories that would follow (*1 Pet. 1:11*). These two strands can be found throughout the Hebrew Bible.

What do these texts together teach about what the Old Testament predicted concerning Jesus? *Psalm 22; Isa. 53:1–12; Zech. 12:10; 13:7; Jer. 33:14, 15; Dan. 7:13, 14.*

In 1 Peter 1:10–12, Peter assures his readers that they occupy a very special place in salvation history. To them had been revealed much more than what was revealed to the prophets of old. The prophets indeed spoke to their own times, but crucial parts of their messages would not be fulfilled until the coming of Christ.

Some of what the prophets had predicted had come true only in the time in which Peter's readers were then living. These readers were able to hear from those "who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven," truths that even the angels desired to know (*1 Pet. 1:12, NKJV*). Having had the gospel preached to them, the people knew in much more detail than did the prophets of old the reality and nature of the Redeemer's suffering and humiliation. Of course, they will have to wait, as will we, for "the glories that would follow" (*1 Pet. 1:11, NKJV*). With the first part of those prophecies fulfilled, we can be certain about the last part, as well.

What biblical promises have you seen fulfilled in your life? Which ones are you still waiting for, what do they mean to you, and how can you learn to hold on to them, no matter what?

Eyewitnesses of Majesty

Read 2 Peter 1:16–18. What other evidence does Peter say he has for his faith in Jesus?

Besides the prophetic word, Peter was an eyewitness to many of the things that he preached about. Christianity, he said, is not founded on “cunningly devised fables” (2 Pet. 1:16, NKJV), but on real events that happened in history—events that he himself had witnessed.

In the Gospels, Peter was there for many of the pivotal events in the life and ministry of Jesus. He was there for the preaching, the teaching, and the miracles. From the early miracle of the fish (Luke 5:4–6) to seeing Jesus in Galilee after His resurrection (John 21:15), Peter was an eyewitness to so much of what happened.

In 2 Peter 1:17, 18, what event did Peter especially focus on regarding what he had personally seen? What was the special significance of that event?

Peter highlights one specific eyewitness event: the transfiguration of Jesus. Jesus had taken Peter, James, and John with Him to the top of a mountain in order to pray (Luke 9:28). While there with them He became transformed before their eyes. His face shone, and His clothes became dazzling white (Matt. 17:2, Luke 9:29). He was joined by Moses and Elijah, and a voice from heaven said, “‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’ ” (Matt. 17:5, NKJV).

Peter had seen a lot in his time with Jesus; yet, this incident stands out. It reveals Jesus to be the Son of God, that His time on earth was spent according to God’s plan, and that He had a very special relationship with the Father. Even with all that Peter had seen or would see, this event—which included “this voice which came from heaven” (2 Pet. 1:18)—was the one that he focused on in this letter.

Think about what event or events have made a deep and lasting impression on your spiritual life and faith. What was it, how did it impact you, and what does it still mean to you today? Why do you think it had the impact that it did? Share your answers in class on Sabbath.

The Morning Star in Our Hearts

“And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Pet. 1:19, NKJV).

Read this text carefully. What is Peter saying that is so important to us, even today?

Here, as we can see in many places in the Bible (*Gen. 1:4, John 1:5, Isa. 5:20, Eph. 5:8*), a division is made between light and darkness. For Peter the Word of God shone like a light in a “dark” place (some translate the word *dark* as “squalid,” “dirty,” as well). That’s why he’s so clear that we need to take “heed” to that light, to follow it until “the day dawns and the morning star rises in [our] hearts.” We are fallen beings, living in a fallen and dark world. We need the supernatural power of God to lead us out of this darkness and to the light, and that light is Jesus.

Peter is pointing his readers to a goal. Some believe that the expression “until the day dawns” refers to the second coming of Jesus. Though that’s certainly our ultimate hope, the idea of the “morning star” rising in your hearts sounds more immediate and more personal. The “morning star” refers to Jesus (*Rev. 2:28, 22:16*). His rising in their hearts seems to be about knowing Jesus, fully taking hold of Him and experiencing the reality of the living Christ in their own individual lives. Jesus shouldn’t be just a doctrinal truth; He should be the center of our existence and source of our hope and faith. So, Peter is establishing a clear link between studying the Word of God and having a saving relationship with Jesus, the “morning star.”

And, of course, with the light shining in us, we will spread it to others. “The whole earth is to be illuminated with the glory of God’s truth. The light is to shine to all lands and all peoples. And it is from those who have received the light that it is to shine forth. The day-star has risen upon us, and we are to flash its light upon the pathway of those in darkness.”—Ellen G. White, *Christian Experience and Teachings of Ellen G. White*, p. 220.

How does your own study of the Word help you to come to know Jesus better?

The More Sure Word of Prophecy

Read 2 Peter 1:19–21. To what prophecies is Peter referring? What does he mean when he says that *no* prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation?

In stressing that Christianity is not based on cunningly devised fables (2 Pet. 1:16), Peter offers up two lines of evidence: first, eyewitnesses (2 Pet. 1:16–18); second, the prophecies of Scripture (2 Pet. 1:19–21), an argument he used earlier (1 Pet. 1:10–12).

Peter also states, “No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation” (2 Pet. 1:20, *NKJV*). In saying this, Peter is not forbidding us to study Scripture for ourselves. That would be very far from the thoughts of the one who said, in 1 Peter 1:13, to “gird up the loins of your mind” (*KJV*) or “prepare your minds for action” (*NRSV*). Nor would it be said by one who commended the prophets of old for their diligent searching after the meaning of the prophecies that they had been given (1 Pet. 1:10).

Then what did Peter mean? The New Testament church progressed together and studied together. Christians were part of a larger body (1 Cor. 12:12–14). And Peter here was warning against the kind of study in which one rejects any insight from the community of believers. In interacting with others we can grow together as a community. The Spirit works with the community and the individuals in it. Insights can be shared, refined, and deepened. But the one who works alone, refusing input from others, is likely to come to wrong interpretations, especially with something such as prophecy.

In the next verses we find a good reason for Peter to make this observation. He is writing to Christians who have among them false prophets and false teachers (2 Pet. 2:1). Peter is urging them to submit their interpretation of Scripture to the leading of the church as a whole. How many people have drifted off into fanaticism and error because they refused to heed the counsel of a Spirit-led community of believers? It was a danger back then, and it remains one today.

Why is it so important to be open to the counsel and advice of the church at large? At the same time, what are the limits on how far we should go in submitting to others?

The Word in Our Lives

As we have seen, Peter placed great emphasis on the Holy Scriptures. Second Peter 1:19–21 is a powerful affirmation of the importance of the Bible to our Christian experience and to the divine inspiration of the Scriptures. His point is clear in 2 Peter 1:21. The Bible is not the product of human will, human devising, like other books. It is a book produced through the power of the Holy Spirit working through “holy men of God.”

Read 2 Timothy 3:15–17. How do these texts help us to understand the role of Scripture in our lives? How do they enforce the truth of 2 Peter 1:19–21?

After warning Timothy about the dangers facing him and the church, Paul gives a brief outline of the importance of Scripture. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16).

Let’s look at these three points.

Doctrine: Doctrines are the teachings of the church. They express the beliefs of the community on various biblical topics deemed important in the Word of God. Ideally, each doctrine should be Christ-centered, and each should teach us something that helps us know how to live in accordance with the “perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2, ASV).

Guidance: Paul tells Timothy that Scripture is profitable for “reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). Peter makes a similar point when he says that the prophecy in Scripture is like a lamp that is shining in a dark place (2 Pet. 1:19). In other words, Scripture provides guidance in how we should live and in what is right and wrong conduct. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Scripture is nothing less than the revealed will of God.

“*Wise unto salvation*”: When he says that Scripture makes us “wise unto salvation” (2 Tim. 3:15), Paul is pointing out that Scripture points us to Jesus. Salvation is built on the belief that Jesus has died for our sins.

Doctrine, moral guidance, the knowledge of salvation: no wonder the Word of God is like “a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Pet. 1:19, NKJV).

Further Thought: “It is the first and highest duty of every rational being to learn from the Scriptures what is truth, and then to walk in the light and encourage others to follow his example. We should day by day study the Bible diligently, weighing every thought and comparing scripture with scripture. With divine help we are to form our opinions for ourselves as we are to answer for ourselves before God.

“The truths most plainly revealed in the Bible have been involved in doubt and darkness by learned men, who, with a pretense of great wisdom, teach that the Scriptures have a mystical, a secret, spiritual meaning not apparent in the language employed. These men are false teachers. It was to such a class that Jesus declared: ‘Ye know not the Scriptures, neither the power of God.’ Mark 12:24. The language of the Bible should be explained according to its obvious meaning, unless a symbol or figure is employed. Christ has given the promise: ‘If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine.’ John 7:17. If men would but take the Bible as it reads, if there were no false teachers to mislead and confuse their minds, a work would be accomplished that would make angels glad and that would bring into the fold of Christ thousands upon thousands who are now wandering in error.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 598, 599.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What other crucial principles are involved in seeking to come to a clear understanding of Scripture?
- 2 Martin Luther wrote that “Scripture is its own light.” By that he meant that there’s an underlying unity in the Bible and that one part can be used to help us to understand other parts. What are some examples of this principle that you can find?
- 3 In class, go over your answer to Monday’s question about the event or events that greatly impacted your Christian experience. What do the events have in common, if anything? What can you learn from one another’s experiences?
- 4 If someone were to ask you how studying the Bible can deepen your walk with the Lord, what would you answer? What principles have you learned from your own experience of seeking to know the Lord Jesus through study of His Written Word?

Putting God in the Picture

As a professional photographer, I take photographs and videos of weddings and other important occasions. I also film documentaries for television and photograph sporting events.

When I first became a Seventh-day Adventist, I wondered how I would ever keep the Sabbath. Most of the events that I covered fell on Sabbath, and I had to work these events in order to keep my job. I had a family to support; so, I decided to go to church on Sabbaths when I didn't have work, but when I had an assignment, I worked.

However, I had no peace about working on the Sabbath. And it seemed that no matter how hard I worked I couldn't get ahead. Someone in my family would get sick, or we would have other unexpected expenses. I asked the pastors at church to pray for us.

Then God stepped in. The company I was working for was bought by another company, and I lost my job. Almost immediately people began calling me to work as a freelancer. I realized that I could have my own business.

Then I heard a sermon about being faithful to God's principles no matter what. That sermon pricked my conscience. I knew that God was nudging me to be more faithful to Him. I decided that I wouldn't take any assignments on the Sabbath. I knew it would be difficult, because most social events occur on the weekends. But I was determined to trust God to supply our needs.

It isn't always easy. Sometimes we've had to ask the landlord for extra time to pay the rent, or think of new ways to make our money stretch. But God is with us.

Just when our financial obligations seemed to overwhelm us, I met a former client on the street. He had owed me money for a long time. We chatted for a few minutes, but neither of us said anything about the money. Then as we prepared to part, he handed me the money he had owed me for years. Several months later, another former client paid me money I had long forgotten and never expected to see.

I don't earn as much as I did when I worked on Sabbath, but God is blessing in other ways. My children have fewer sicknesses, and we have fewer unexpected bills. I know that we have no need to fear for the future. I try to encourage others to be faithful, and I assure them that God will always provide a way.

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The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *2 Peter 1:16–21*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Acknowledge that Scripture is God’s authoritative source for knowledge of God’s will and for our salvation through Jesus Christ.

Feel: Find the objective revelation of Christ in Scripture to provide a better source of faith and hope than any personal, subjective experience that he or she may have.

Do: Give priority to the place of Scripture in the life, as he or she would to a light shining in a dark place.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: A More Reliable Prophetic Word

A Peter described the prophetic Word as being more reliable than what?

B What makes the prophetic Word so objective and reliable, like a light in the dark?

II. Feel: The Risks of Subjective Experiences

A How did Peter express his confidence in his own personal experience with Jesus?

B What are the dangers in relying on our own personal sensory experiences?

III. Do: Trust God and His Word.

A Why should we trust God’s Word more than our own subjective experiences?

B What does Peter say that we must understand “above all”? What is the nature of the process of revelation and inspiration described in verse 21?

► **Summary:** Peter cites his own sensory experiences with Jesus as a reliable basis for his accounts of Jesus’ power and coming. But he then declares that God’s prophetic Word is more certain than are these subjective personal experiences, because it has its origin in the Holy Spirit.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *2 Peter 1:20, 21*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: As humans, we tend to place confidence in our experiences and in the evidence of our senses. This tendency we deem to be dependable, even rational and scientific. Observation is the basis for empirical science. Yet, we can be fooled by our senses. After appealing to the value of sensory experience as evidence for the truth of his gospel message, Peter steps up the test for truth by declaring that there is a more reliable basis for determining reality and truth, namely, the prophetic Word of God. It has its origin not in the will of humans but in the moving of the Holy Spirit on the minds of His agents.

Just for Teachers: We live in a very scientific age; yet cynicism abounds regarding the possibility for determining truth by objective methods. The means by which truth was supposed to be determined in the modern period was the empirical method—eliminating uncontrolled variables, such as the supernatural—so that all aspects of a matter could be accounted for under strict testing conditions with many observers over time in order to produce an assured result. In many areas, including religion, no consensus was produced over an extended period of time, so cynicism developed regarding the possibility of any assured result from this method. Consequently, postmodernism came in, denying any absolute truth or any metanarratives that fully explained something. Personal experience became the basis for truth, with all truth being subjective and relative to one's experience. How does Peter's message address this tension?

Opening Activity and Discussion: Ask the class to read together 2 Peter 1:16–18 and Matthew 16:27–17:8. Discuss the evidences Peter cites for the veracity of his claims regarding Jesus. Why was he justified in citing his own experience as evidence that he was not cleverly inventing stories? How could Peter distinguish between this experience and something he may have merely imagined?

►STEP 2—Explore

Bible Text: *2 Peter 1:16*

Just for Teachers: Peter directly counters the skepticism regarding the genuineness and authority of his teaching, not only in his own day but also in ours. He has not been sharing with believers cleverly invented stories; he has been sharing his own real-life experiences. One might expect that this claim would authenticate the genuineness of his testimony as the author of the letter; however, for skeptics it has had just the opposite effect. They argue that the author tries too hard to prove who he is. They see this attempt as evidence that Peter is not the author but, rather, that the letter was written by someone else. Those skeptical of Peter's authorship fail to see themselves in 2 Peter 3:3 as scoffers who are following their own evil desires and denying the truth of God's Word. How are we often like these skeptics, failing to see the applicability of Scripture to our own situations?

Bible Commentary

I. An Even More Reliable Testimony (*Review 2 Peter 1:19 with your class.*)

Despite the reliability of his eyewitness testimony, Peter now argues for a still more reliable testimony, one that cannot fail. The evidence presented to our senses can lead us astray, as it sometimes does. Scripture repeatedly warns against allowing our senses to deceive us (*Matt. 7:15; 24:24; 2 Cor. 11:13, 14; 2 Thess. 2:9, 10; Rev. 13:13, 14*).

Many illusionists make their livings doing tricks that fool the mind, but Satan is the master sorcerer. He works his deceptive signs and wonders, usually through individuals who have subscribed to his sophistries. Peter, conscious of the dangers of following the evidence of our senses, recommends a safer source for learning truth. God's Word is the only source of truth that is entirely safe and reliable. We "will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises" in our hearts (*2 Pet. 1:19, NIV*).

Consider This: "The day" is a reference to the anticipated "day of the Lord" (*2 Pet. 3:10, NIV*) or "the day of God" (*2 Pet. 3:12*), also called "the day of judgment" (*2 Pet. 2:9, 3:7*) and "the day of visitation" (*1 Pet. 2:12, NKJV*). It is the Second Coming. "The morning star" is a reference to Jesus Himself (*NIV*). He declares in Revelation 22:16, "I am . . . the bright Morning Star" (*NIV*). The "morning star" derives its name from being the brightest "star" in the morning sky, the last light of the night to fade as the day dawns. Astronomers identify the planet Venus as the morning star, but Jesus takes this title to Himself. The Morning Star will fully rise in our hearts when "the day dawns." What are we doing to prepare for the rise of the true Morning Star in our hearts?

II. The Origin of the Prophetic Word (Review together 2 Peter 1:20, 21.)

Peter begins 2 Peter 1:20 with the words, “Above all, you must understand . . .” (NIV). There is nothing that his readers need to understand more clearly than the basis for confidence in the prophetic Word of God. It did not originate in the human will. Rather, “prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21, NIV). Peter argues here for an incarnational revelation in which the divine message was entrusted to human agents as a means of revealing God’s thoughts through the work of the Holy Spirit. The initiative and message are God’s; He is responsible for the content and its preservation.

Regarding the human element in Scripture, Ellen G. White explains, “The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God’s mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God’s penmen, not His pen.”—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 21. She adds this clarification: “It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man’s words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God.”—Page 21.

Consider This: How confident can we be of the divine element in the production of the message of Scripture?

Discussion Questions:

❶ What do we learn from our experiences with God and His promises? In what ways do they confirm our trust in Him? Why can we—and indeed, must we—always trust God over our senses?

❷ What is it about the prophetic Word that makes it so trustworthy? How does the record of the fulfillment of prophecy help to build our confidence in the reliability of God’s Word?

►STEP 3—Apply

Thought Questions:

❶ In what ways might we sometimes behave as though we don't trust the record of Scripture? How can we counter this temptation?

❷ If no prophecy of Scripture came about by a prophet's own interpretation, what would be a safe methodology for deriving God's intended meaning from Scripture?

Activity: Have the class read together 2 Timothy 3:14–16. Discuss the basis for Timothy's understanding of Scripture, according to Paul, and the value of a correct understanding of Scripture for all believers.

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: We tend to speak glibly about the importance of belief in salvation. But we need more than just an intellectual belief or assent to certain truths or realities. James 2:19 tells us that even the demons believe in God but that belief does not save them. Belief, James says, needs to be accompanied by commensurate actions (*James 2:14–17*). A better term than “belief” is “trust.” Trust implies not only an intellectual acceptance of certain realities but also a readiness to commit to action based on the conviction that God knows what is best. He has revealed His will for our lives in His Word, and He will empower us to accomplish His will as we commit ourselves to it.

Activity: Have the class draw up a list of biblical prophecies that have been fulfilled and the evidences of their fulfillment. Discuss the confidence in Scripture that we can have—and can share with others—as a result of seeing the evidence that God knows all things, including the distant future, and that we can trust Him and His plan for our lives.