

Peter on the Great Controversy (War Between Christ and Satan)



SABBATH—MARCH 5

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 1 Peter 2:9, 10; Deuteronomy 14:2; 1 Peter 4:1–7; 2 Peter 1:16–21; 2 Peter 3:3–14; Daniel 2:34, 35.

MEMORY VERSE: “But God chose you to be his people. You are royal priests. You are a holy nation. You are a people who belong to God. All of this is so that you can sing his praises. He brought you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9, NIV).

PETER'S WRITINGS ALSO ARE FILLED WITH THE GREAT CONTROVERSY THEME. Maybe that is because he knew for himself, better than most, how easy it is to fall for Satan's tricks. So he was very aware of how real the struggle is.

Peter finds the struggle unfolding in different ways. He finds a struggle going on in the church. In the church are those who once fellowshiped with the believers but who are now negative and critical of God and of any thought of Christ's return. Peter speaks strongly against the people who laugh at the church. This is because if faith in the promise of Christ's return were to be lost, what hope would remain?

Again, maybe Peter supports faith so positively because of his own failures. He knows what it is like to deny Jesus and to try to fit in with the crowd so that others would not criticize him for being a follower of Jesus. So, Peter's focus is on how important it is for believers to live a life worthy of their high calling from the Lord.

DARKNESS TO LIGHT (1 Peter 2:9, 10)

Read 1 Peter 2:9, 10. How is the great controversy found in these two verses?

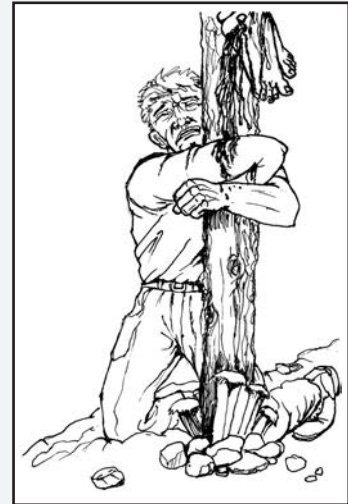
These verses come from Exodus 19:6, “‘a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’” (NKJV); and Deuteronomy 7:6 (repeated in Deuteronomy 14:2), “a holy people,” “chosen . . . to be a people for Himself,” and “a special treasure” (NKJV). These words of encouragement were given during the Exodus. God’s people were being released from slavery and were on the way to the Promised Land. Peter makes a comparison¹ between the people of God during the Exodus and the church in his day.

So, Peter’s words are not a description of something final but, rather, of something continuous. Yes, we have been chosen by God to serve and love Him. And we are to publicly praise God for bringing us out of the darkness that Satan has taken the world into. But that does not make us perfect (read Philippians 3:12). Knowing of our own sinfulness and weaknesses is a crucial part of what it means to follow Jesus and to sense our need for His righteousness (holiness) in our own lives.

“It is arranged in such a way that every sinner may come to Christ. ‘He [Jesus] saved us. It wasn’t [was not] because of the good things we had done. It was because of his mercy.’ Titus 3:5, NIV. Suppose that Satan tells you that you are a sinner and cannot hope to receive blessing from God. Then tell him that Christ came into the world to save sinners. We have nothing to recommend us to God. And our very helpless condition makes Jesus’ saving power necessary for our salvation. We need to put aside our pride and self-dependence. And then we may look to the cross of Calvary and say, ‘In my hand no price I bring; / Simply to Thy cross I cling [hold on to].’”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 317.

We know that we have been brought “out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9, NIV). We must recognize just how dependent we are upon Christ, who “has become God’s wisdom for us. He makes us right with God. He makes us holy and sets us free” (1 Corinthians 1:30, NIV).

What goes through your mind when you feel beaten and discouraged by your actions and even your own character (thoughts; feelings; actions)? How do you deal with those thoughts when they come? How can you still grow spiritually despite having these thoughts?



“‘Simply to Thy cross I cling.’”—*The Desire of Ages*, page 317.

DEFINITIONS

1. comparison—the act of showing how two or more things are the same or different.

PEER PRESSURE² (1 Peter 4:1–7)

Read 1 Peter 4:1–7. Why are our lifestyle choices important? How do they influence our getting ready for Christ’s second coming?



We need to pray for those who pressure us and let God make us more sensitive to their problems.

Peter says that believers have already spent enough of their lives doing what others around them pressured them to do (1 Peter 4:3). But now things have changed. And now others might think that believers may be “strange” for not joining the crowd when they once did. This may lead nonbelievers to gossip negatively about the believers (1 Peter 4:4, NKJV). So, Satan will even use our former friends to discourage us in our walk with God.

Peter encourages believers not to be influenced by these attacks. The “Gentiles [non-Jews]” will be judged by God later. So, there is no need to worry about what they think (1 Peter 4:5).

Peter’s point is serious and important. How many people do you know who have fallen under the pressure of other people’s opinions? They do so instead of standing up for what they believe. This is very tough on young people, who struggle with what is known as “peer pressure.”

We should not worry about being accepted by others and obeying their opinions. Instead, Peter encourages believers to be kind and loving to others (1 Peter 4:8, 9, NKJV). This is not just some additional duty we must fit onto our Christian to-do list. Rather, it is the most important thing we do and the most important way of fellowshiping with people around us. Maybe that is why Peter suggests that we need to get serious in our prayers (1 Peter 4:7). This is because God knows that sometimes we can be more serious about pleasing the “Gentiles” than being kind to those close to us. We need to pray for those who pressure us, and let God make us more sensitive to their problems. As “a royal generation and a holy priesthood,” we are asked by God to influence them for the good, instead of letting them influence us for the bad. This was the sad history of Israel. The pagans (nonbelievers; idol worshipers) were not being influenced for good by Israel. Instead, they influenced Israel for evil.

What kind of peer pressure do you have? How can you stay strong? In what ways are the words “overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21) helpful in such situations?

DEFINITIONS

2. peer pressure—a feeling that you must do the same things as other people your age and in your social group in order to be liked or respected by them.

THE MORE SURE WORD OF PROPHECY
(2 Peter 1:16–21)

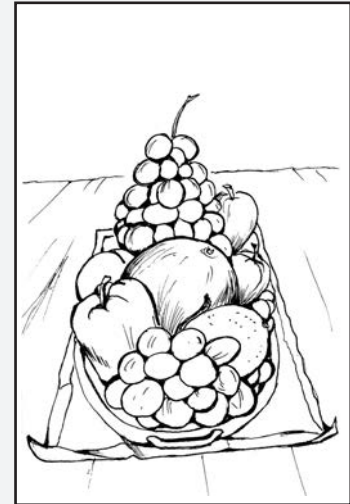
Read 2 Peter 1:16–21. What is he saying about prophecy (special messages from God that tell about what will happen in the future) that is so important?

Peter had seen many things in his time. He also lists some in these verses: (1) Jesus transfigured³ on the mount (2 Peter 1:18), and (2) the support of the prophecies (special messages from God) about Jesus (2 Peter 1:19). Each of these had a great influence on Peter. But he spends more time on the last point—the prophecies. This may have something to do with his own failures as a disciple. How many times had Peter not listened to what Jesus was saying because he thought he already knew what was being said? But, when things happened exactly as Jesus had said several times, how many times was Peter caught unprepared? Probably the most painful of all these “failures” was Jesus’ prophecy that Peter would deny Him. Peter was so sure that could never happen. But when it happened, it must have been the lowest point in his life.

Maybe this is why Peter sets out to explain how to be a faithful follower of Jesus. He reminds the followers of “very great and valuable promises” through which they may “share in his [Jesus’] nature.” These promises will help believers “escape from the evil in the world. That evil is caused by sinful longings” (2 Peter 1:4, NIV). To make sure that the believers have indeed escaped evil desires, Peter makes a list of principles (important rules) for the Christian lifestyle: faith, virtue (purity), knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love (2 Peter 1:5–8). Each builds on the other, and together they combine into a single unit that is like a cake. Paul calls these same qualities “fruit” rather than fruits (Galatians 5:22, 23). This is because they are combined into a unit that cannot be separated.

Peter goes further by saying that the believers would not fall if they made these values part of their lives and asks them to carefully make their “calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10).

Remember that Peter is writing his epistle (letter) to Christian members established in the faith. He is not suggesting that following a special set of requirements will make us sure of a ticket into heaven. Peter is just challenging Christians to spend their energies on positive things rather than negative ones.



**Our lives must show the
“fruit” of faith, virtue,
knowledge, self-control,
patience, godliness,
brotherly kindness, and
love.**

DEFINITIONS

3. transfigured—changed into glorious (beautiful and holy) form.

SCOFFERS⁴ (2 Peter 3:3–7)

Read 2 Peter 3:3–7. What is Peter saying here about the past that can help us deal with issues in the present and the future?



The devil is like a hungry roaring lion looking for its next meal.

The battle between light and darkness and between the followers of Jesus and the doers of evil seems about to reach its end. The devil is like a hungry, roaring lion looking for its next meal (1 Peter 5:8). He is helped by a group of people who make fun of believers. These people who made fun of believers are scoffers. With their “reasoned” and “scientific” arguments (2 Peter 3:3, 4), these scoffers try to destroy the faith of believers. Peter suggests that what pushes them is their desire to continue living their lustful lifestyle (2 Peter 3:3; read also Jude 18). They reason that Jesus is not coming because everything just keeps going as it always has.

There is one thing that bothers us about the scoffers. Jesus said, “I will come again” (John 14:1–3), but these scoffers are saying, “Jesus will not come again” (read 2 Peter 3:4). This is an echo from Eden, where God said, “‘Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die’ ” (Genesis 2:17, NKJV). Satan, through the serpent, said, “‘You will not surely die’ ” (Genesis 3:4, NKJV). Satan’s words go directly against the Word of God (Bible). Now words similar to Satan’s are being said to try to cast doubt about the certainty of the soon Second Coming. And these doubts are being said not by just one voice, as in the Garden, but by many voices everywhere. One good thing is that Peter foretold this lie. Every time we hear someone laughing at the idea of Jesus coming again, these scoffers become another fulfillment of prophecy.

History has witnessed the past destruction of the earth by a worldwide Flood. But the scoffers do not want to know about that. They do not want to admit that God has anything to do with their personal life choices. They also want to avoid the fact that the same God who stored up water to flood the earth has stored up fire to sweep over the earth to destroy it on the great Judgment Day (2 Peter 3:5–7). Their mistaken hope is that nature will just keep on going as it always has.

How do we, as the years go by, hold on to the promise of the Second Coming? Why is it very important that we do?

DEFINITIONS

4. scoffers—people who laugh at and talk about someone or something in a way that shows disapproval and a lack of respect.

HASTENING (HURRYING) THE DAY (2 Peter 3:8–14)

To us, the wait for the Second Coming never seems to end. But the time is not a problem with God. “With the Lord a day is like a thousand years. And a thousand years are like a day” (2 Peter 3:8, NIV).

Read 2 Peter 3:8–14. What is the long-term hope we are given here? Read also Daniel 2:34, 35, 44.

The classic time prophecies clearly tell us that there is a limit to how long evil can continue and how long God will wait. In the prophecies, God shares His plan to end sin and suffering and to return the earth to its original perfection.

Our idea of how everything will end influences how we live now (2 Peter 3:12). If we rebel at (fight against) the idea of God dealing with our little world, then we will become doubters and join the scoffers. But if we believe that the end of all things means that a merciful God will finally step in to clean up the sins all around the world, then we are “looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13, NIV).

Again Peter voices his concern (worry) about our attitudes (feelings) and personal actions. He encourages us to work hard in being “found pure and without blame” (2 Peter 3:14, NIV). If it was not for the next verse, we may think that Peter is teaching a “works” religion. But he corrects this possible misunderstanding with the wording “our Lord’s patience means salvation,” supporting the words of Paul to the same believers (2 Peter 3:15, NIV).

Being blameless (faultless) is our goal. That is how Job was described. Job was blameless because he “feared God and shunned [avoided] evil” (Job 1:1, NKJV). That is how Christ will present us to the Father (1 Corinthians 1:8; Colossians 1:22; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:23). Being spotless (perfect)? That is what the sacrificial lamb had to be (for example, Exodus 12:5; Leviticus 1:3). That is what Jesus was (Hebrews 9:14; 1 Peter 1:19), and it is how He presents the church to the Father (Ephesians 5:27).

In our quest to overcome sin, to grow in faith, and to avoid evil and live holy and “blameless” lives, why must we always depend on the righteousness of Jesus that is given to us by faith? What happens when we take our eyes off that promise?

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Peter warned that scoffers would say, “ ‘Everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation’ ” (2 Peter 3:4, NIV). This was nothing new. Others had these same thoughts before the Flood. “Time passed. And there was no clear change in the natural world around them. So, men who had trembled with fear began to become bold. They thought that nature had more power than God. They also thought that nature’s laws were so strong that God Himself could not change them. They reasoned that if the message of Noah were correct, nature would be turned out of her course. So they turned that message into a great lie that would fool the world. They showed their rebellion [war] against the warning of God by doing just as they had done before the warning was given. . . . They said that if there were any truth in what Noah had said, famous and wise men would understand the matter.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs [Forefathers and Leaders] and Prophets [Special Messengers]*, page 97. Today, “the great men” tell us something that is just like this. They say that the laws of nature are fixed and set, and all things continue on as before. In a sense, that is what the theory of evolution⁵ teaches. Life, they say, can be explained through the operation of natural laws. They also say that one day science will fully explain these natural laws to us, and all without any need of God. No wonder Paul wrote, “The wisdom of this world is foolish in God’s eyes” (1 Corinthians 3:19, NIV). It was in the time of the Flood, it was in Peter’s time, and it is in our time too.

DEFINITIONS

5. theory of evolution—a theory (unproved idea) that the differences between modern plants and animals are because of changes that happened by a natural process over a very long time.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Peter had many reasons to believe in Jesus. But he especially pointed to the “sure word of prophecy.” Why is prophecy so important to us? How did prophecy help prove that Jesus was the Messiah (Chosen One) at His first coming? What hope does it give us for the Second Coming? After all, without prophecy, how could we even know about the promise and hope of the Second Coming?
- ② We often think of peer pressure when we think of teenagers and young adults. But that is not correct. We all want to be liked and accepted by our peers. After all, we have a much better opportunity to be good witnesses if they like us, instead of not liking us, right? In our desire to be pleasing to others, how can we guard against making our beliefs weaker? Why is giving up our beliefs easier to do than we might think?