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# An Exegesis of 2 Peter 1.16-21

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*"I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things." – 2Peter 1.15*

### **Introduction:**

I grew up in a Lutheran family whose parents were dedicated every-Sunday-morning-minor-festival-midweek-Lent-and-Advent-Holy-Week-Ascension-Day-Christmas-Eve-Christmas-Day-morning-New-Year's-Eve worshippers. (We skipped New Year's Day since it was the same service as the previous night). In our German gothic sanctuary I recall paying faithful attention to the hymn boards that flanked the chancel. They told me which Sunday of the church year calendar we were celebrating. Some of those Sundays puzzled me. No explanation was given for Septuagesima, Sexagesima, and Quinquagesima – the seventieth, sixtieth, and fiftieth days before Easter - that season of pre-Lent to prepare for the great fast of Lent.

Before we eased into Lent we celebrated the Transfiguration, another word that I normally did not use in my limited vocabulary. I remember that this was an event in Jesus' life, which I, at the time, equated with Prince Adam of Eternia, endowed with power from the sorceress of Castle Grayskull, transforming him into He-Man. "Why didn't Adam use that power all the time?" I thought. While the comparison between He-Man and our Lord Jesus Christ might border on blasphemy, it was where my mind wandered and so I wondered, "Why didn't Jesus do this all time?"

This afternoon we will answer that question as we examine the transfiguration of Jesus, but today through a lens different than that of the gospel writers - the eyes of the apostle Peter. Through this exegesis of 2Peter we will compare it to the Synoptic gospel accounts and provide background information and contextual clues as to why Peter cites this jaw-dropping event in the life of our Savior in this, Peter's last will and testament.

### **Author and authenticity:**

There is no doubt that the author is Simon Peter, as he identifies himself in the greeting of this letter (1.1). In this second letter he refers to the previous letter written to his readers (3.1), claims to be an eyewitness to the transfiguration of Christ (1.16-18) and refers to the apostle Paul as "our dear brother" (3.15), claiming to be an individual of the same generation as Paul. Although the style of the two letters is very different, we note the following: firstly, 1Peter was written with the help of Silas (1Pet 5.12) and 2Peter mentions no secretary. Secondly, the content of this letter is entirely different from 1Peter. 1Peter was written to encourage Christians during their time of persecution. 2Peter warns his readers to watch out for false teachers within the church.

In spite of its clear authorship, this letter has been termed "the red headed stepchild of the New Testament" (to which I take no offense – as being a ginger, I have no soul). One commentator writes, "No book in the Canon is so poorly attested among the Fathers, yet 2Peter has incomparably better support for its inclusion than the best attested of the excluded books."<sup>1</sup> Eusebius (A.D. 265-340) records Origen (ca. A.D. 185-253) as the first to mention the book of 2Peter by name.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Green, *The Second Epistle General of Peter and the General Epistle of Jude*, (TNTC; London, Tyndale, 1968), 13

<sup>2</sup> Eusebius, *Eccl. History* 6.25.8, citing Origen, *Commentary on John*, 5.3

Eusebius himself treated it as inauthentic, although he accepted the letter as written by Peter.<sup>3</sup> It was not until after Eusebius during the time of Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria listed it in his Festal Letter (A.D. 367) that the letter started to gain general acceptance and canonical. Jerome reported, “He [Peter] wrote two epistles which are called Catholic, the second of which, on account of its differences from the first in style, is considered by many not to be by him.”<sup>4</sup> 2Peter appears in the Latin canon of the Synod of Carthage (A.D. 397). Although Luther even voiced concerns similar to Jerome’s he did not remove this letter from the canon and quoted it quite freely.

Another objection to the authenticity of this letter is its similarity to Jude. A comparison of 2 Peter and Jude has spilt much ink on pages and pages of commentaries. Some scholars wonder if Jude drew from Peter or Peter relied on Jude or if both used another independent source. The easiest explanation is that either Jude or Peter relied on each other, deeming each other’s work as divinely inspired, as Peter did with Paul’s letters (2Pet 3.15-16). Borrowing from other works was common in ancient writings. Bottom line: both authors were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write what they did.

**Content:**

Peter encourages his readers to remain faithful in light of the coming end, to grow in faith through the inspired word, to watch out for false teachers and be ready for the day of the Lord.

**Background:**

We have very little information about the recipients of this letter, although 2Peter 3.1 indicates that this letter was written to the same communities of believers to which 1Peter was addressed. We then can conclude that Peter wrote to Christians living in Asia Minor: Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia.

We also know this letter was written toward end of the apostle’s life (1.13-15). If we accept tradition that Peter was martyred in Rome under Nero, then he must have written it between A.D. 64 (the great fire of Rome, which marked the start of Nero’s persecution of Christians) and A.D. 68 (Nero’s suicide). Although he does not specify his location in this letter, we could reasonably assume he was in Rome, which, in his first letter he sarcastically refers to as “Babylon” (1Pet 5.13).

**Purpose and Occasion:**

The main purpose of this letter was to remind God’s people of the truth (1.12) and to warn them about false teachers (chapter 2) who might rob them of their salvation (chapter 3). Apparently, certain false teachers endangered this particular Christian community by their detrimental doctrine and lifestyle. These apostates originated from within the community (2Pet 2.1). The main objection of these false teachers was their denial of the second coming of Christ and the subsequent judgment, “Where is the promise of his second coming?” (3.4) They

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* 3.3.1-4; 25.3

<sup>4</sup> Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men* 1

based their evidence on the fact that nothing had changed since the creation of the world and concluded that nothing will change in the future (3.4-7). Since they viewed God as untrustworthy, they claimed that the Old Testament revelation was unreliable, and therefore, so was the word of the New Testament apostles and evangelists.

Peter's response in this letter focuses on Jesus and his coming. He provides proof that the readers of his letter can trust what he says about the powerful and glorious return of Christ and the subsequent final judgment.

**Theme of 2Peter:** Remain Faithful in Light of the Coming End.

Chapter 1) Grow in faith through the inspired word.

Chapter 2) Watch out for false teachers.

Chapter 3) Be ready for the day of the Lord.

**Immediate context:**

Peter has just urged his readers to keep adding a rich supply of seven virtues to their faith (vs5-7) and to make their calling and election sure (vs10). Both of these are reached only by constant use of the Word of God. Beginning in chapter 2, Peter will warn his readers about false prophets, whose teachings could lead them away from God to their eternal destruction. In these intervening verses (1.16-21) he will assure them that they have the truth in what the apostles have told them and what the prophets have written in the Scriptures. The false teachers doubted the future coming of Jesus Christ, maintaining that life will go on as it always has. If there is no second coming or judgment, Peter's emphasis on pursuing godliness collapses. Living a godly life is optional if one's heavenly destiny is not involved.<sup>5</sup>

After Peter calls his readers to remember what they had been taught (1.12-15), he transitions to the source of the apostolic teaching: 1) eyewitness accounts; 2) prophecies fulfilled; 3) the divine inspiration of the Scriptures. The written record Peter would leave them is truth and points to the very real return of Christ in glory.

**The verses for our consideration this afternoon in summary:**

- 1) We (that is, Peter, James, and I) were eyewitnesses to the honor and glory that the Father bestowed on him when he gave us a glimpse of his divine glory, even of what will be made manifest at his *Parousia* (on the Last Day); and
- 2) His *Parousia* has also been foretold by prophetic Scripture, which is not the product of man's private interpretation but is the very Word of God.

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *The New American Commentary, Vol.37, 1,2 Peter, Jude*, (Broadman & Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN, 2003), 311-12

## Text Study

### Verse 16

**Οὐ γὰρ σεσοφισμένοις μύθοις ἐξακολουθήσαντες ἐγνωρίσαμεν ὑμῖν τὴν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ δύναμιν καὶ παρουσίαν ἀλλ' ἐπόπται γενηθέντες τῆς ἐκείνου μεγαλειότητος.**

**Translation:** *For not after following craftily devised myths did we make known to you the powerful coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but after becoming eyewitnesses of his majesty.*

**Paraphrase:** *I will do this because we didn't follow cleverly invented myths when we told you about the powerful appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ. Rather, we told you this as people who saw with our own eyes how great he is<sup>6</sup>.*

*"...we were eyewitnesses of his majesty."*

Mt 17.2 "his face shone like the sun, his clothes became as white as the light"

Mk 9.3 "his clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them."

Lk 9.29 "the appearance of this face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning."

**γὰρ** points back to vs15. Peter had just said that he would make every effort to keep his readers "firmly establishing in the truth you now have" (1.12) and that he would leave a written record to make sure their steadfast faith would continue after he died. Now he wants to establish the fact that what he told them and the written record he would leave them are the truth.

Apparently, false teachers had accused the apostles of using cleverly devised fables to make their claim about Christ and his return. Promoting myths about gods and heroes was common in the Greek-speaking world. This topic was a frequent concern for the Apostle Paul in his pastoral letters.<sup>7</sup> Peter defends the truth of the coming of Christ by appealing to his eyewitness testimony of the events at Christ's transfiguration.

The false teachers had asked, "Where is this 'coming' he promised?" (3.4) Peter zeros in on the coming of Christ and points out that the transfiguration foreshadowed the powerful second coming of Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup> Peter and the other

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<sup>6</sup> David P. Kuske, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Peter, Jude*, (Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, WI, 2015), 302-3

<sup>7</sup> 1Tim 1.3-4a; 4.7; 2Tim 4.4; Tit 1.14 (NIV2011)

<sup>8</sup> Power is associate with Christ's second coming, a common theme in the New Testament (Matt 24.3,27,30,37,39; Mk 9.1, 13.26; Lk 21.27; 1Cor 15.23; 1Thes 3.13,

apostles (James and John) saw it. Notice the switch from the first person in vs15 to the third person in this verse, as he speaks in solidarity with the other apostles who witnessed the transfiguration. Peter uses their eyewitness testimony not so much to defend the integrity of the apostles, but the reality of “the very great and precious promises” (1.4), namely, that “our God and Savior Jesus Christ” (1.2) will return for the final judgment of all people and will rule forever.

Peter is sure to include **τὴν ... δύναμιν καὶ παρουσίαν**, most likely a hendiadys, establishing *power* and *coming* as a unit: “the powerful appearance”. The apostle defends the truth, which the false teachers have denied, “Jesus is the King. He will come again with power and glory.” Peter points to the divinity of Jesus by saying, “We were eyewitnesses of his **μεγαλειότης**.” During his earthly ministry Jesus kept that divine majesty hidden for the most part (like Adam in *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe*), manifested at his transfiguration and will reveal it fully to all people on the last day.

*The suggestions for Malady, Corresponding Virtue, Illustrations and Homiletical Applications that follow each verse were the product of breakout group sessions at the conference:*

**Malady:**

- Considering ourselves (our own education/knowledge) adequate to understand Jesus and his glory - what he can and can't do in our lives - rather than relying on the truth of Scripture.
- Acting like Jesus isn't coming back/not believing that he's actually going to do what he says he will.
- Denying the power of Jesus' divinity.
- Believing the lie that our own myths make God's truths into myths.
- Wanting God to use his power how I want him to when I want him to.

**Corresponding Virtue:**

- In times of guilt/distress/depression, etc., return to the Word and the powerful return of our Savior that it promises.
- What we have in the Word is true - eyewitness accounts.
- Our faith is based on a historical Savior who did historical things to win a real salvation.

**Illustration:**

- People taking things for truth that have no basis in fact (The Onion; fake news) vs. the certainty of Peter's witness
- You don't need to see power for it to be there - “potentiality”

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4.15, 5.23; 2Thes 2.1,8; Ja 5.7,8; 1J 2.28) In the Hellenistic world παρουσία was used for the arrival of a ruler or god (TDNT 5.859-61)

- stained glass window in Rhineland, WI, Hodag with a sword through it labeled "truth"

Homiletical Implications:

- Who can we trust? Our Savior.
- Combating Premillennialism etc.

## Vs17,18

λαβὼν γὰρ παρὰ θεοῦ πατρὸς τιμὴν καὶ δόξαν φωνῆς ἐνεχθείσης αὐτῷ τοιαῦδε ὑπὸ τῆς μεγαλοπρεποῦς δόξης· ὁ υἱὸς μου ὁ ἀγαπητὸς μου οὗτος ἐστὶν εἰς ὃν ἐγὼ εὐδόκησα, <sup>18</sup>καὶ ταύτην τὴν φωνὴν ἡμεῖς ἠκούσαμεν ἐξ οὐρανοῦ ἐνεχθεῖσαν σὺν αὐτῷ ὄντες ἐν τῷ ἁγίῳ ὄρει.

**Translation:** *For he received honor and glory from God the Father when such a voice was carried to him from the Majestic Glory, "This is my son, my beloved, in this one I am well-pleased." And we ourselves heard this voice, which was carried from heaven when we were with him on that holy mountain.*

**Paraphrase:** *Jesus received honor and glory from God the Father when a voice spoke to him while we were covered with the majestic glory. The voice said, "This is my Son whom I love. I am delighted with him." When we were there with him on that holy mountain, we heard that voice speaking from heaven.<sup>9</sup>*

Peter now specifies what he and the other apostles (John and James) witnessed regarding Jesus' majesty, "He received glory and honor." Christ received glory by the glorious transfiguration of his body and the honor God the Father gave him when he called him his "beloved Son." The transfiguration was a historical event that really happened. The apostles heard those words and saw the glory.

Peter does not include the command of the Father, "Listen to him," as the Synoptic gospel accounts record. Peter also does not include the conversation between Moses, Elijah and Jesus. One possible explanation is that Peter places more emphasis on Jesus as the messianic, eschatological King of Psalm 2 in combination with the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 42. The Synoptics focus more on the revelation of Jesus' deity, which he had largely put aside voluntarily in his state of humiliation. While the Synoptics focus more on Jesus' road to the cross, they also introduce the

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<sup>9</sup> Kuske 304-5, 307

transfiguration as a foretaste of the *parousia* (Mt 16.28; Mk 9.1; Lk 9.27) as does Peter.<sup>10</sup> Peter's account of the transfiguration stresses that Jesus has already been invested with authority to judge the nations. If those false teachers were dishonoring Jesus, this passage points to the most honorable status Jesus has already been given.<sup>11</sup>

Peter connects the transfiguration to Christ's baptism with the retelling of these words from the Father, "...with him I am well pleased." At his baptism Jesus began his three-year road to the cross. From the mount of transfiguration he is revealed as the King who will come again in glory. The words of the Father, both at his baptism and here, proclaim his honor and glory for the task he would also accomplish at the cross and empty tomb. This honor and glory was also a preview of the praise God the Father would grant to his Son at his second powerful coming.

Peter refers to the Father as the *Majestic Glory* pointing his readers back to the Old Testament theophany on another mountain, Mount Sinai, and the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem.<sup>12</sup> The disciples knew from Old Testament events that a bright cloud was associated with the presence of the glory of the LORD.

The thought abruptly ends here, an anacolouthon in the Greek, as if the author wishes to place dashes after the final thought implying, "We saw that!" In vs18 Peter continues with the facts, "We also heard that!"

Malady:

- Many people claim to have "truth," but have no facts to base it on.
- We don't think Jesus is all that great - he could really stand to show some more power
- God is not "well-pleased" with me.
- Seeking your own glory/honor.

Corresponding Virtue:

- Peter provides proof to back up what he presents as truth.
- The voice of God speaks and we get to listen to it.
- Imputed righteousness because of Jesus
- Soli deo gloria. "That they may see him."

Illustration:

- Quran has lots of contradictions, is the work of one man, and never explains itself. The Bible is the work of God through many writers and appeals to facts to explain itself.
- Theophany on Sinai

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<sup>10</sup> Curtis P. Giese, *Concordia Commentary: 2 Peter and Jude*, (Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO, 2012), 81-2

<sup>11</sup> Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K., 2006), 205

<sup>12</sup> Exodus 19-20, 34, 40; 1Kings 8.8-18 NIV2011

- Selfies - look at me and what I got to see/do, but Peter doesn't draw any attention to himself. It's all about Jesus.
- We're in award season - the highest accolade isn't "best actor" or a trip to the White House, but God saying "This is my Son."
- Christ's glory was revealed not in his face or clothes, but in the voice, the Word.

Homiletical Implications:

- Power in weakness - Jesus is so glorious that he then goes out to suffer
  - you don't feel powerful when you're dealing with sin in your life, but Jesus was.
- Credible eyewitnesses: not just the apostles, but God "this is my Son."

## Vs19

καὶ ἔχομεν βεβαιότερον τὸν προφητικὸν λόγον, ᾧ καλῶς ποιεῖτε προσέχοντες ὡς λύχνῳ φαίνοντι ἐν ἀσχηρῷ τόπῳ, ἕως οὗ ἡμέρα διαυγάσῃ καὶ φωσφόρος ἀνατείλῃ ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν,

**Translation:** *And we have the completely reliable word of the prophets, to which you are doing well to keep on holding as to a light shining in a dark and miserable place, until the time when the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.*

**Paraphrase:** *We also have the Word spoken by the prophets. We can be very sure that what they said was true. You are doing the right thing by holding on tight to this Word like a light shining in a dark place. Do this until the Day dawns when the Morning Star rises in your hearts.<sup>13</sup>*

Not only are the false teachers attacking the legitimacy of the apostles' teachings, but also seem to criticize the message of the Old Testament prophets. Peter adds to his defense by pointing to the Old Testament prophetic message which also told of the future coming of the Lord.

In contrast to the myths the false teachers were accusing the apostles of promoting, Peter points to the "the completely reliable word of the prophets." The prophetic word encompasses the entire content of the Old Testament scriptures that told of the coming Messiah.

One view of this passage is that the prophetic word of the prophets is made more certain by the transfiguration, that is, the Old Testament Scriptures predicted

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<sup>13</sup> Kuske 310-11

the event of the transfiguration.<sup>14</sup> Others think this to be a reference to Psalm 2.7 and Isaiah 42.1, a reference to the eternal generation of the Son. Another view is that the reference is to Old Testament prophecies about the establishing of the Messianic kingdom.<sup>15</sup>

It is preferable to see a reference to the Old Testament prophecies related to the Day of the LORD, Christ's second powerful coming. The word *Scripture* reveals that the writings are in view, the whole Old Testament Scriptures, not a single event like the transfiguration.<sup>16</sup> The transfiguration and the apostles' witness to it confirms the proper interpretation of the Old Testament Scripture: there is a future coming of Christ for judgment and salvation.<sup>17</sup> The apostles were surer of the Old Testament prophecies about the Christ after seeing Christ's majesty. The testimony of the Holy Scriptures refutes the false teachers' accusation that the apostles were peddling myths.

Peter encourages his readers to cling to these words of prophets made more certain by the transfiguration. Peter uses a present tense in **προσέχοντες**, commending his readers for what they are already doing, holding firmly in faith to the reliable words of the Old Testament prophets who pointed to Jesus as the Christ.

Peter then specifies the function of the Scriptures in the world: they are a source of light in this dark world. This **φαίνοντι** continues to shine. Perhaps Peter is drawing on one of the many passages in the Bible that use light as a picture for the Word of God (e.g. Ps 119.105). Perhaps the dark place is a reference to Peter's current situation (most likely in prison), the presence of false teachers in the midst of his readers, or the influence of the sinful world around them and the sinful nature in them.

The apostle encourages his readers to hold on to the light of God's Word "until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." Hold on to that light until you no longer need it, that is, at Christ's second powerful coming.

Peter uses the natural beauty of God's creation to point his readers to Christ's second return. The rising morning star, most likely the planet Venus, signals that a new day is dawning. The morning star could be a reference to Numbers 24.17, "A star will come up out of Jacob." That text goes on to say that God's enemies will be crushed, which fits Peter's eschatological focus on judgment, which waits for his opponents. The Apostle John in Revelation 22.16 will later identify Jesus as "the bright Morning Star" who will signal a new day for the people of God.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey *2Peter 1:16-21*, 514-16; *2Peter, Jude* (Yale University Press, 2007), 178-79

<sup>15</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *2Peter, Jude*, (Zondervan, 1997), 75

<sup>16</sup> Schreiner 319, So Wolfe, "2Peter 1:20 Reconsidered," 96;

<sup>17</sup> Schreiner 319

<sup>18</sup> John makes more references to Jesus as light in Revelation: believers will be living in the light of Jesus (22.16); the lamp of the heavenly Jerusalem (21.23) in whose light "the nations will walk" (21.24). Malachi 4.2 speaks of the coming of the LORD as the advent of the "the sun of righteousness."

When Jesus comes again the Word of God will no longer be needed as a light for believers. The darkness of the unbelieving world will be ended. At the last day Peter writes that this light shines and the morning star will rise “in your hearts”. The effect of Christ on the heart of believers is dependent on Christ’s second coming. To be sure, the light of Jesus shines in the hearts of believers upon conversion. However, on the Last Day the knowledge and joy of God that currently shines in our hearts since conversion will reach its consummation at the second coming.<sup>19</sup> When Christ comes we will know fully (1Cor 13.12) because we will see Jesus face-to-face. Every spot of sin that darkens this fallen world, including our own bodies and souls, will scatter. The light of Christ will shine in our hearts for all eternity.

The words of the prophets are the light all believers will continue to cling to until Christ comes again in all his glory, to take his people to glory everlasting. That word is like a lamp illuminating the darkness. Believers will need that word for direction until the day of the Lord comes.

Malady:

- We live in a world of unreliability - you see it most of all in relationships - Do we have a God we can rely on? When the people whom we expect to be reliable let us down, we could blame God, and that takes us to a dark place.
- Do we show by our lives that we trust God’s Word as reliable?
- Trying to find a different “light” to hold onto - trite “religious” sayings

Corresponding Virtue:

- Hold to the Word in your dark place - the Word of a God you can rely on. His is the only Word, the only light, that’s reliable enough to bring you out of your darkness.
- Christ is our light - hold onto the light
- Even though there is lots that we don’t know/understand, we have the one light that matters.

Illustration:

- Reliability: House built on the Rock; Joseph’s life (looks like God’s not all that reliable, but he’s working toward his eternal purpose); also Daniel to Babylon, Isaiah. Confidence that the light is going to “stay lit”
- Complete cave darkness
- The Hobbit: “Stay on the path” through the forest, and when they stray is when they get into trouble.
- The devil is someone who sneaks into a grocery store and switches prices on ground beef and filet mignon - losing hold on the light because we think we’ve got something better.

Homiletical Implications:

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas S. Caulley, *Inspiration in 2Peter 1:16-21*, (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. University of Tübingen, 1982), 140-41

- If we don't have the light of Christ to show us the way, we get lost, wander off, and get into trouble.
- This would be a good End Times text...

## Vs20-21

These verse are the *sedes doctrinae*, the seat/source of doctrine for the divine inspiration of the Scriptures. Gerhard wrote:

The instrumental causes of Holy Scripture were the "holy men of God" (2Pet 1.21), that is, men whom God immediately and especially called and chose for this purpose: to put down in writing the divine revelations. They were the prophets in the Old Testament and the evangelists and the apostles in the New. Consequently, we correctly call them the amanuenses of God, the hands of Christ, the scribes or notaries of the Holy Spirit, since they neither spoke nor wrote by human will or their own will, but rather were... driven, led, impelled, inspired, and controlled by the Holy Spirit."<sup>20</sup>

## Vs20

τοῦτο πρῶτον γινώσκοντες ὅτι πᾶσα προφητεία γραφῆς ἰδίας ἐπιλύσεως οὐ γίνεται·

**Translation:** *Since we know this above all that every prophecy of Scripture does not come about from one's own interpretation.*

**Paraphrase:** *The main reason to hold on tight is this: You know that no prophecy of Scripture is the result of a person's own explanation of things.<sup>21</sup>*

Note: In the *CW Supplement* lectionary, 2 Peter 1:20 – 2:3 is the Second Reading for Pentecost 2, Year A.

Peter just said that the word of the prophets is completely reliable, now he gives the reason why this is true: no Scripture came about because of the prophets' personal spin on what they thought God had revealed to them. The Venerable Bede wrote,

The prophets heard God speaking to them in the secret recesses of their hearts. They simply conveyed that message by their own preaching and writing to God's people. They were not like pagan

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<sup>20</sup> Johann Gerhard, *On the Nature of Theology and on Scripture*, (Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO), 45-46

<sup>21</sup> Kuske 313

oracles, which distorted the divine message in their own interest, for they did not write their own words, but the words of God.<sup>22</sup>

Now we must address *ἰδίας ἐπιλύσεως* “from one’s own interpretation.” Scholars are divided on the interpretation of this phrase. Some say that this passage prohibits any individual Christian from interpreting Scripture by themselves outside of an authority, such as the church.<sup>23</sup> If that is true, then *ἰδίας* refers to any reader of Scripture rather than the prophets who authored Scripture.

When we look at the present context of 2Pet 1.16-18 the apostle addresses the divine origin of the apostolic message. In the next verse he will address the same issue in regards to Scripture in general. He also uses *γὰρ* in vs21 to connect his thoughts about the origin and inspiration of the whole of Scriptures, not a later personal interpretation of Scripture by an individual reader.<sup>24</sup>

In his first letter Peter points out that being a prophet did not bestow omniscience. Instead, they searched the Scriptures to find answers and clues about the coming Messiah because they did not always understand the full significance of what they were writing.<sup>25</sup> No single passage of Scripture came into being as a result of an individual’s own explanation about God. (Peter will explain how each passage came about in the next verse.) The word of the prophets is reliable because their words were not their own interpretation of God’s vision to them.

In addition, not only were the words the prophets scribbled down on papyrus not their own, but also the words they proclaimed orally to the people. Not only did dreams and visions come from God, but the “interpretation”, literally, the *ἐπιλύω*, “the speaking out” of them also came from God. By contrast, a false prophet prophesied from his own mind or spirit.<sup>26</sup>

Malady:

- “Well that’s your interpretation.” The word “interpretation” is a loaded one. For many people, it’s based on their feelings or experiences rather than on any Word of God. “Truth” as relative.
- The idea that this is an outdated book by a bunch of people who lived in a world that’s too different from today’s to be relative.
- Picking and choosing what we want to believe.
- Elevating human reason/church authority/tradition above Scripture.

Corresponding Virtue:

- The Bible is clear and authoritative

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<sup>22</sup> Bede *Commentary on 2Peter* (Bray, James, 1-2Peter, 1-3 John, Jude, ACCS 11.141)

<sup>23</sup> J.N.D Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, (A&C Black, 2001), 324

<sup>24</sup> D. Edmond Hiebert, *Second Peter and Jude*, (Journeyforth, 1989), 82.

<sup>25</sup> 1Pet 1.10,11 (NIV2011)

<sup>26</sup> Jer 14.14; 23.16; Eze 13.3 NIV2011

- od’s plan of redemption is witness enough that the truth of Scripture is not subject to our feelings/intellect/experiences. The “foolishness of God” is wiser than our wisdom and more reliable than anything we could come up with on our own (we wouldn’t have done what God did). Though we take care in our use of Scripture, we don’t need to worry about misinterpreting it as long as we allow Scripture to interpret itself. That gives us a great deal of confidence.

Illustration:

- God’s preservation of his Word through the OT period
- Thomas Jefferson’s Bible
- The “power” of good feelings vs. the true power of the Word

Homiletical Implications:

- Mark Paustian “Prepared to Answer” uses the story of the transfiguration to answer the objection, “But that’s just your interpretation.” Let Jesus tell you what he means.
- God means what he says.

## Vs21

**οὐ γὰρ θελήματι ἀνθρώπου ἠνέχθη προφητεία ποτέ, ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ πνεύματος ἁγίου φερόμενοι ἐλάλησαν ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἄνθρωποι.**

**Translation:** *To be sure, prophecy was not uttered ever by the will of a man, but men spoke from God while uttering by the Holy Spirit.*

*Paraphrase: This is so because no person ever spoke a prophecy on his own. Rather, holy people said what they did while speaking by the Holy Spirit.<sup>27</sup>*

**ἀπὸ θεοῦ** The variants -- several ways of making ἅγιοι the modifier of ἄνθρωποι -- are worth considering. This is familiar to readers of the KJV: “but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” Nevertheless the shorter reading (without the word ἅγιοι) seems to be the more likely one. A scribe might have added ἅγιοι but probably would not have deleted it. Both readings teach that the Bible was inspired by God.

Don’t miss the play on this verb φέρω as to the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures:

“17 For when he received honor and glory from God the Father when such a voice came [ἐνεχθείσης, ‘was carried’] to him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased’ ... 18 and we actually heard

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<sup>27</sup> Kuske 314-15

this voice which came [ἐνεχθεῖσαν, ‘was carried’] from the sky when we were with him on that holy mountain.... 21 for prophecy was not ever brought about [ἠνέχθη] by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were being carried [φερόμενοι] by the Holy Spirit.”

Not only did the false teachers question the apostles’ word about Christ and his second coming, but they also questioned the source of the Old Testament Scriptures. Peter begins this verse with the conjunction γὰρ to confirm the negative statement in the previous verse that the content of Scripture did not originate in the prophet’s own interpretation. He begins the first clause following γὰρ with another negative statement, “not... ever did the will of man utter a prophecy.”

The second clause follows with a positive declaration ἀλλὰ “by way of contrast...” Peter puts ὑπὸ πνεύματος ἁγίου up front to emphasize the Holy Spirit as the primary mover in the transmission of Scripture.

The passive voice removes the human role in the process of inspiration. Men spoke as they were being moved along by the Holy Spirit. The closest parallel passage is in Acts 27.15,17 where Luke uses the passive voice of φέρω to depict the ship in which he and Paul were passengers: the sailors lost control of the vessel and without any human steering the ship was driven along by the wind. Just as a sailing ship could never move at all without the force of the wind, no Scripture came into existence without the agency of the Holy Spirit.<sup>28</sup>

The prophetic word of the Old Testament prophets came entirely from the Holy Spirit as the originator.

This means that the prophets received their prophecies from God and transmitted what he wanted to say, not what they wanted. They were fully aware that the message had been given to them, and they made no attempt to put their own interpretation on it. If they could not bring themselves to accept what the Spirit had said to them, they kept their mouths shut, as Jonah did, for example, when he refused to preach to Nineveh (Jonah 1.1-3), and Balaam also did when he was commanded to say what had been communicated to him (Num 22.35).<sup>29</sup>

This does not mean that the writers were merely secretaries in a business office, writing down what the Holy Spirit dictated to them. The human element does come in with ἐλάλησαν, “men spoke.” They wrote and they proclaimed the word. They received a role in the divine inspiration of Scripture. Each used his own vocabulary and his own writing style. Evidence is found when one compares the vocabularies and styles of the biblical writers. The Holy Spirit made use of the

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<sup>28</sup> Giese 95

<sup>29</sup> Oecumenius, *Commentary on 2Peter* (Gerald Bray, James, 1-2Peter, 1-3 John, Jude, (IVP Academic, 2000) ACCS 11.141)

writers' own mental abilities, education and learning, watched over them as they wrote to ensure that every word would be God's truth.<sup>30</sup> In this way Peter addresses the accusations of the false teachers and reassures his readers that the light they continue to cling to is the Word of God, it is truth, it points to Jesus as the Christ, who will return with power and glory and honor.

For your people: the fact that the Bible, written by men, is God's Word assures of two things: 1) the Bible has no errors but is true in everything it says<sup>31</sup>, and 2) they will trust all the promises of the Bible because they know God will keep them.<sup>32</sup>

For you: have confidence and conviction when you get into the pulpit. What you share with your people is not your message. You have just come from the palace of the great King with good news for his people. Have confidence and conviction when you bring that Word to the dying, when you knock on the door of the inactive or sit at the kitchen table of those under discipline, or when you open that Word as you sit on the couch with your family or spouse. This is the Word of God for God's people, and he has entrusted you with it, so that they may see Jesus.

Malady:

- Pentecostal-style "prophecy;" new revelation
- Saying that the human element in the writing of Scripture leaves it liable to error or contradiction.
- A sermon illustration taking the primary spot in the congregation's mind instead of the Word (people didn't come to hear about the pastor's vacation with his family)

Corresponding Virtue:

- All Scripture is given "under the control of" God. He guided it and ensured the true, clear revelation of his message in every part of it.

Illustration:

- Teaching a child to walk - they're moving their legs and doing the walking, but you're holding on and won't let them fall
- Ship blown by wind
- Doc J carrying a student in a desk across the classroom at sem to prove the point

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Overall Malady:

Overall Corresponding Virtue:

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<sup>30</sup> 2Tim3.16a; John 17.17 NIV2011

<sup>31</sup> John 10.35 NIV2011

<sup>32</sup> Num 23.19 NIV2011

Telic Note: The Holy Spirit through this Word of God wishes to \_\_\_\_\_ my hearers to \_\_\_\_\_ .

Propositional Statement: Peter encourages his readers to trust the word about Christ that had been taught to them. Peter points to the transfiguration of Christ as proof of that reliable word. He was an eyewitness. The prophecies about Jesus have been fulfilled. The Scriptures are divinely inspired.

Theme/parts:

*What follows is worship planning that was the product of one of the breakout groups at the conference:*

We envision this taking place on Ascension, Pentecost, and Trinity Sunday in a typical church year.

Witness - The Ones Who See that Christ's work is the end of all things.

The Ministers | Ascension - Ephesians 4:1-13, Acts 1:1-11

The Word | Pentecost - Joel 2:28-32, Acts 2:14-41

The Trinity | Transfiguration - 2 Peter 1:16-21, Mark 9:2-13,

Peter's perspective on the End Times is the sort of key or angle of approach for this series. He and the other leaders in the very early church are almost obsessed with the End Times, even to the point that it was a problem for them that had to be addressed in Paul's letters to the Thessalonians.

But there was a reason they were so focused on the End Times. *They're the point.* The Old and New Testaments attest the fact that, compared the minuscule lives and drop-in-a-bucket histories this planet has the chance to know, the eternal glory of God realized in full after the 2nd, powerful coming of Jesus is what really matters and what really gives life meaning.

Peter learned this while he experienced major events in Jesus' life, and particularly through the Transfiguration. Transfiguration, for him, was an eschatological event in a few different ways. When it happened, he thought it was the End. He wanted to stay there, in the glory of God, realized in the glowing face of Jesus. But then they came down, and they had important questions. In the last part of Mark 9's Transfiguration account we hear the disciples ask an eschatological question about Elijah. Though it may seem natural to gloss over that question, the sentiment made sense, especially the more you can see Christ as an End Times bringer through the eyes of the apostles.

Peter and the other apostles were focused on the coming kingdom of God. When Peter beheld Christ's transfiguration, part of him was pumped - he believed that the end times were happening. He was therefore confused at the betrayal and crucifixion. The resurrection raised his hope back up, and at the ascension he very naturally asks if Jesus was going to restore the kingdom to Israel. Pentecost serves as a lightning rod for Peter's maturing understanding of Jesus' real purpose, and his unique experience at Cornelius' house did, too.

It isn't really until 2 Peter 1 that he explains what he had figured out through all of this. The transfiguration was the key, but it wasn't the point. The great victory, the coming of the kingdom of God, has been clear as ever since the prophets wrote about it. The transfiguration serves as a means to enhance the truths of the prophets, revealing that Jesus is in fact that God that was promised - it was briefly glimpsed at transfiguration - but it was described by them.

Everything Peter hoped for, his whole perspective on the coming of the kingdom of God, he figured out as he meditated on and studied Scripture regarding God's victory at judgment. He states that we have the prophets, an even more certain and reliable source for what is coming than the transfiguration.

