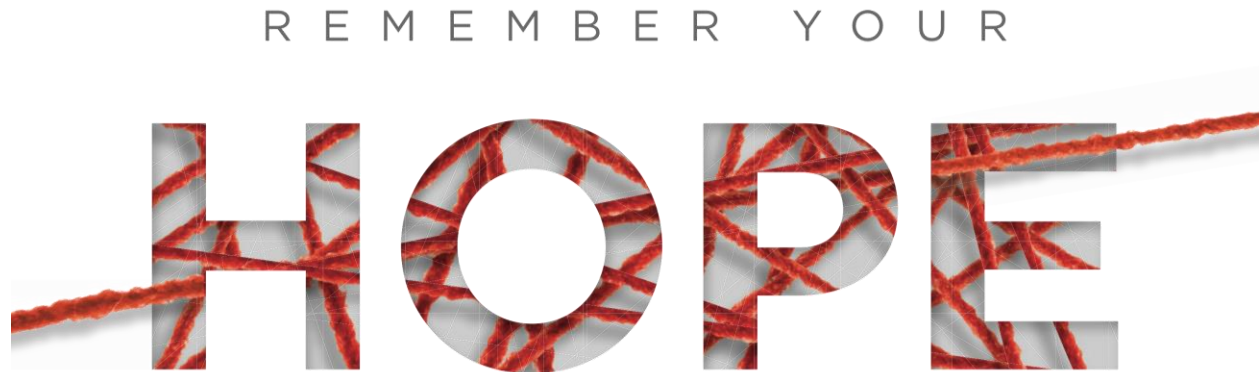


Lesson 2: 2 Peter 1:16–21

Hook



Main Point: The disciples did not make up the stories about Jesus. They were eyewitnesses to His glory at the transfiguration, and prophecies of Scripture were confirmed.

In the current digital age, the Internet is becoming the primary source for information. In 2019, a survey was conducted by Pew Research to assess how often people use the Internet. Pew found 93 percent of college-educated adults testified to using the Internet daily.¹ The growing skepticism of credibility as a product of “fake news” has heightened the demand for credible sources. In an attempt to extinguish this skepticism, junior high and high school educators are beginning to teach students to discern the credibility of Internet resources. A Georgia school superintendent, Richard Woods, suggests for students to ask seven questions about every Internet source:²

1. Do you know who the source is, or was it created by a common or well-known source?
2. How does it compare to what you already know?
3. Does the information make sense?
4. Can you verify that the information agrees with three or more other reliable sources?
5. Have experts in the field been connected to it or authored the information?
6. How current is the information?
7. Does it have a copyright?

¹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/07/25/americans-going-online-almost-constantly/>

² <https://www.wabe.org/how-teachers-are-trying-to-help-students-identify-real-news/>

Q: Can you think of any more questions that should be asked to determine the credibility of a source?

Q: Do you struggle with trusting sources? Why or why not?

Q: Ask someone to share a funny story of a time when he or she was provided wrong information by an unreliable source?

Book

Main Point: The disciples did not make up the stories about Jesus. They were eyewitnesses to His glory at the transfiguration, and prophecies of Scripture were confirmed.

Text Summary: False teachers were telling the people that Jesus wasn't really coming back; there was no hope in the Second Coming; it was just a myth. Peter assures his readers that they can trust in the hope of the Second Coming because the disciples witnessed His majesty and glory in the Transfiguration and because the prophets of the Old Testament foretold it. Both involve God's Word. God spoke at the Transfiguration, calling Jesus His Son, and God spoke through the prophets. Scripture is not just man's interpretation, but God's Word spoken through human beings by the power of the Holy Spirit.

2 Peter 1:16–21

Talking Point 1: We need to be able to recognize false teaching when we hear it.

Read 2 Peter 1:16–21. (Note: It is unusual for us to read the whole passage and then go back and break it down, but this passage warrants it. We need to understand the background and Peter's overall point to understand what he is saying in each of the two points.)

Q: Why does the Second Coming of Jesus matter?

Q: How can we recognize false teachers? How can we know how to respond to them?

Peter was responding to false teachers who were denying that Christ would come back again in glory – His Second Coming (2:1; 3:4). These false teachers were arguing that it wasn't really true; Jesus wasn't coming back, and the disciples had made it all up to control the believers. If we look ahead to chapter 3, we see their arguments: Didn't they say Jesus would be coming back soon? He didn't come in glory as the Old Testament promised. He came and died, and everything is going on as it always has. Nothing has changed. He isn't coming; they just made it all up to control you, to keep you in line (3:4).

Peter disproves the arguments of these false prophets in detail in chapters 2 and 3, but as New Testament scholar Peter Davids wrote, "This section closes the argument before it starts."ⁱ Peter's thesis statement is so strong, he doesn't really have to continue with his argument to prove it, but he does. Peter's argument is simple. We didn't make this up; God said it:

- First, in the prophecies of the Old Testament (1:19–21)
- Then, at the Transfiguration, where He also *showed* it, by revealing His glory (1:16–18)

Peter considered both of them to be God's direct Word. In the Transfiguration, they heard God's audible voice. The words of the prophets were not their own, but the word of God

through them by the Holy Spirit (1:21). These aren't made-up stories. They aren't myths. They are the Word of God. You can trust in the promise of the Second Coming because God Himself has promised it.

God had been promising the coming of the Messiah and the day of judgment, called "that day" or "the day of the Lord," for centuries in the Old Testament. Messiah would come, defeat evil, and the kingdom of God would begin – that glorious, perfect kingdom where God sits on the throne and reigns in peace and harmony and there is no more pain, suffering, death or evil. The people expected it to all happen at once, but what actually happened was a two-part coming of the Messiah, what scholars call "inaugurated eschatology."

In Jesus' First Coming, He came to earth, both declaring with His words that the kingdom of God had arrived and proclaiming it with His miracles – healings that showed a kingdom in which there was no pain, death or disease, and exorcisms that showed Jesus has supreme authority over demons in His kingdom. Then, in His Resurrection, He defeated evil, sin and death. But the Day of Judgment and full consummation of the kingdom of God is still to come. Scholars call this the "already/not yet" – the kingdom of God is "already" here, but "not yet" in its fullness. Jesus Himself taught that the kingdom of God was already here (Luke 17:21), but not yet in its fullness (Matthew 24:14). That will only happen when He comes back to consummate what He has started (Mark 8:38; 13; 14:62). Jesus promised that in that day, they would see Him coming in the clouds with great power and glory (Mark 13:26).ⁱⁱ

As we learned in lesson 7, the entire church age is this "in-between time" of God's kingdom – the time between Christ's First and Second comings. Evil, sin and death have been defeated on the Cross, but they have not yet been destroyed. This is what the false teachers didn't understand and why they denied a Second Coming of Jesus. The New Testament writers used language similar to that which Jesus used to talk about the kingdom of God and the end times. When Peter says, "the end of all things is at hand" (4:7), he isn't necessarily saying that Jesus is coming back in the next few years. Jesus said even He did not know when He would return (Mark 13:32). Peter is referring to the entire church age as "the end of all things." We are living in "the end times" even if Judgment Day is still a thousand years off because we are in "the end" of God's story of salvation. We are living in the final act (1 Corinthians 10:11).ⁱⁱⁱ

We'll get into more detail about his two arguments in the next two talking points, but Peter's overall theme is focused on trusting God's Word over what false teachers say. This is the root of the very first sin – that Adam and Eve believed what the Enemy said over what God said. Peter considered both of the examples he gave to be God's direct voice – both His spoken voice and His written Word through the prophets. Christians are always called to "test the spirits" to see if they are from God by comparing what they say to what God has said in His written Word (1 John 4:1). As we have said before, that means we need to know God's Word well, so we can recognize false teaching when we hear it.

Q: Why is false teaching often easy to believe over the truth? (see 2 Timothy 4:3)

Q: How can we have patience and trust in God’s eternal promises when things don’t look the way we expected or hoped?

Re-read 2 Peter 1:16–18.

Talking Point 2: We can trust that Christ is coming again because of the preview of His glory in the transfiguration.

Q: What are the pros and cons of eyewitness testimony?

Q: Why does the disciples’ testimony of the transfiguration matter in proving that the stories of Jesus’ Resurrection are true?

Peter starts with his own eyewitness testimony of the glory of Jesus at the Transfiguration. He emphasizes several times that “we” (not just he), both saw the glory and heard the voice of God. It was not a vision or a dream; it really happened. It was not a myth they heard somewhere; they saw it with their own eyes and heard it with their own ears. In ancient cultures, eyewitness testimony from a reliable witness was one of the most valuable forms of evidence, but testimony had to be given by two or three witnesses, not just one (Deuteronomy 19:15). Even today, eyewitness testimony is valuable, but hearsay testimony is considered not admissible in court.^{iv} Over the centuries since the Bible was written, many have argued that we can’t believe the testimony of the disciples, that they (or whoever wrote the New Testament) just made it all up. But apologetics has answered this argument with two main points:

- The differences in the eyewitness testimonies between the four Gospels makes their testimony *more* reliable. If eyewitness testimonies sound too alike, a court would think they made it all up, but since there are differences in details, they are believed to be true stories told from different people’s perspectives, with different memories.^v
- The disciples wouldn’t have died for something they *knew* was a lie. If they had made it all up, why on earth would they give their lives for it? The Gospel didn’t make them rich or famous or benefit them in any material way. When faced with persecution, wouldn’t they have given in and said, “No. Sorry, we made it all up” to avoid death? Either the stories were true, or they at least believed they were true enough to stake their lives on it.^{vi}

Peter claims that the Transfiguration was not only a foretaste of Jesus’s Resurrection, it was also a foretaste of His Second Coming, when he will “see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory” (Mark 13:26).^{vii} In all three Gospels, the story of the Transfiguration happened *immediately after* Jesus’s prophecy that there were some standing there who would not pass from the world until they had seen the Son of Man coming in his kingdom (Mark 9:1). This connects the Transfiguration theologically to the Second Coming. These three disciples were getting a glimpse of King Jesus in all His glory.^{viii} Peter repeats “majesty” or “glory” (or both together) four times just two verses (vv. 16–17).

Peter had not only seen the Resurrection – Jesus alive again after His death – he had also seen Jesus in His *glorified* state. He had no doubt of the divinity of Christ. He had every confidence that Jesus would do as He promised, that He would return in glory. The fact that it may not have been happening as quickly as they would have liked or expected didn't matter. Later, Peter would remind his readers that time is different for God (3:8). We may think God is being slow about sending Jesus back, but it is because He is allowing enough time to save as many people as possible (3:9). Our idea of "a long time" is different from God's, who has a long-term, overarching, big-picture plan of redemption:

- When God promised Adam and Eve a "seed" who would crush the serpent (Genesis 3:15), it was 4,000 years before it happened.
- When God promised Abraham a nation full of his children living in their own land (Genesis 12:1–3), it was 600 years before it came true.
- When He promised a Messiah to David (1 Samuel 7:14), 1,000 years passed before He came.
- When He promised a Messiah to Isaiah (Isaiah 40:3), it was 730 years until He came.
- When He promised a Messiah to Malachi (Malachi 3:1), it was 430 years before He came.
- Then, there were over 400 years of silence, with no prophets, no word from God, just waiting.

Their expectations of what Jesus would do and who He would be had been wrong before. The false teachers were questioning the Word of God and the promises of His Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords. The One to whom every knee will bow (Philippians 2:10–11). Christ has already been given all power, authority, and honor (1:17). These false teachers will have to give an account to "Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead" (1 Peter 4:5). Whom would the people believe? The eyewitness testimony of one of Jesus' closest followers, who had only proven himself to be reliable and honest and full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:8–10)? Or these impatient false teachers who doubted the very Word of God?

Q: Why can we, being thousands of years removed from biblical times, still trust the eyewitness testimony of Peter and the rest of the apostles?

Q: How does imagining Jesus in all His glory and majesty on the throne make you think of Him differently than imagining Him as the rabbi from Nazareth?

Q: How would you respond to Jesus if you saw Him in all His glory?

Read 2 Peter 1:19–21.

Talking Point 3: We can trust the prophecies and promises in God's Word.

Q: Why should we pay attention to God's Word?

Q: How can we know that Scripture is really God's Word and not just what some men wrote down?

The Transfiguration only confirmed what God had already said through His prophets (1:19). In Jesus' promises about His Second Coming, He refers to Himself as "the Son of Man" coming in glory (Mark 13:26). If we heard the phrase "Son of Man" without studying its usage in the Bible, it would be logical to think that "Son of Man" refers to Jesus' humanity while "Son of God" refers to His divinity. Actually, both phrases refer to Jesus's divinity.

The term "Son of Man" comes from a vision in Daniel 7 of the heavenly throne. In Daniel's vision, he saw four great beasts, which represented four kingdoms of the world. The beasts were boasting before the throne of God, described by Daniel as "the Ancient of Days." Then, "one like a son of man" came before the throne and the Ancient of Days gave Him all authority, glory and sovereign power and all the people of every nation, tribe and tongue worshipped Him (Daniel 7:1–14). The Jews of Jesus' time expected the Messiah to be a human king sent from God, while the Son of Man was thought to be a divine being. But Jesus combined these two images to say that He is *both* the human Messianic king *and* the divine Son of Man from Daniel 7. The Messiah *is* the Son of Man. Messiah was more than they had expected. The Messiah was both human and God. He would not rule on just the throne of Israel; He would reign forever on the throne of heaven.

In the Old Testament, there are hundreds of prophecies of "the day of the Lord," a day when the Messiah will come and judge the nations, ushering in a glorious future for God's people and their King (e.g., Zechariah 7–12). This is what the Second Coming of Jesus is. This is why it matters. The Day of Judgment will be a double-edged sword – judgment for the wicked, but vindication for the righteous. In the new covenant, the "righteous" are those who have faith in Jesus. Not because of their own righteous acts, but because they have taken on the righteousness of Christ (Romans 4:22–25). God's people can look forward to the day of the Lord with joy instead of fear! This is why the Second Coming was such an important theology for Peter, why he encouraged them to hope in the promise of it, no matter what the false teachers said.

Peter's argument agrees with the rest of the Bible, that Scripture is not just mankind's interpretation or thoughts about God. It is God's very Word, spoken or written through man by the power of the Holy Spirit (1:20–21; 2 Timothy 3:16). This is why it can be trusted. Because *"God is not man that he should lie or a son of man that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken and will he not fulfill it?"* (Numbers 23:19). God's promises are a sure thing (Romans 4:21). We can put our hope in them. It is not a "wishful thinking" kind of hope. The biblical definition of *hope* is an expectancy – *knowing* that it will happen, just waiting for it.

This is why Peter can agree with the psalmist in describing God's Word as a "lamp shining in a dark place" (1:19; Psalm 119:105). God's sure promises bring light and hope to a dark world. Peter's readers, who were struggling and wondering why Jesus had not come, didn't have to

doubt that He would. They simply had to trust that His timing would be perfect. That He would return at just the right time, just as He promised He would. One day, the “day” of the Lord will dawn (1:19) and the “morning star” – Jesus (Revelation 2:28), will “rise in our hearts” (1:19). It will be a day of joy and celebration as we could never imagine. In that day, God Himself will be our light (Revelation 22:5). Until then, His Word is the light shining in the darkness, lighting our path and guiding the way (1:19).

Q: What would it look like for you to follow God’s Word as a “light unto your feet,” like a flashlight on a dark night?

Q: Why do we find it hard to trust God’s Word over what other people say?

Q: What would it look like for you to live your life with expectant hope about Jesus’s Second Coming, with an attitude that said, “Come, Lord Jesus, come!”?

Took

Main Point: The disciples did not make up the stories about Jesus. They were eyewitnesses to His glory at the Transfiguration, and prophecies of Scripture were confirmed.

Peter's point in this passage is to remind the recipients of these letters that recognizing "fake news" is a big deal! In their case, false teachers were denying the Second Coming of Christ. Peter asks them to consider the source! Peter appeals to his eyewitness account of the Transfiguration and the prophecies of the Old Testament. Considering Peter's appeals, how would we assess his credibility using the questions from our Hook?

1. Do you know who the source is, or was it created by a common or well-known source?
Yes, Peter indicates that he has a relationship with the recipients of the letter (3:1). Also, Peter was a well-known apostle who aided in the inauguration of the first churches in Jerusalem.
2. How does it compare to what you already know?
Peter's appeal to the OT prophecies shows that the idea of the Second Coming is not a new idea in Judaism, but the affirmation of ancient Jewish prophecy.
3. Does the information make sense?
Yes, in future lessons we will hear Peter's defense of the Second Coming of Christ using logic and references from the Old Testament.
4. Can you verify that the information agrees with three or more other reliable sources?
Yes, at the Transfiguration, there were Peter, John and James. These are witnesses who can verify the credibility of the story.
5. Have experts in the field been connected to it or authored the information?
Yes, Paul, John, James, Luke and Matthew write about the Second Coming of Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, 5:23; Titus 2:3; Colossians 3:4; 1 Corinthians 1:7, Philippians 3:20; James 5:7–9; Mark 8:38; John 5:28–29; 1 John 3:2–3; Luke 9:26; Revelation 20:11–15).
6. How current is the information?
Considering this is a letter, it was written within days of the receiving the letter.
7. Does it have a copyright?
Considering Peter was an apostle (passing the tests of being an apostle in Acts 1:21–25) this is as close to a first-century copyright on this information as you can get!

Our conclusion is clear: Peter's eyewitness account of the Transfiguration proves he is a credible source to assure the hope for believers in Christ's future coming.

CHALLENGES

THINK: *About Christ's Second Coming.* Imagine what it will be like in the moment you see Him in the clouds. Imagine what it would be like to see Him in all His glory. How would you react? What would you feel? What would you do?

PRAY: *For an eternal perspective.* Pray for the wisdom to live with an eternal perspective, living with Christ as your King now, just as He will be in heaven. Pray for the heart to put your hope in Christ rather than the things of this world. Pray for the desire to share the Good News of Christ and His return as often as possible.

ACT: *Study.* Read about Jesus' Second Coming in Matthew 24:27–31; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; and 2 Peter 3:10–13. Take notes and compare what each passage has to say about what that day will be like.

ⁱ Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 198–201.

ⁱⁱ John Bright, *The Kingdom of God* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953).

ⁱⁱⁱ Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter, NICNT* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 155–6.

^{iv} Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Eerdmans, 2006).

^v Simon Greenleaf, *The Testimony of the Evangelists: The Gospels Examined by the Rules of Evidence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Classics, 1995).

^{vi} Norman L. Geisler, Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004).

^{vii} G.H. Boobyer, "St. Mark and the Transfiguration," *The Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol 41, No 162 (April 1940), 119–140.

^{viii} William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter, The Daily Bible Study Series* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1976).