

Until the Day Dawns
2 Peter 1:16-21

Peter was one of Jesus' closest disciples. Of the twelve Apostles, Peter, James, and John were Jesus' inner circle. Matthew, in chapter seventeen of his gospel, tells us that Jesus took Peter, James, and John up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.

Seeing Jesus conversing with Moses and Elijah, Peter suggested building shrines for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. While Peter was saying this, a voice came from heaven saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" (Matthew 17:1-5)

Peter was convinced. He saw Jesus' glory, and he would never forget it. Peter, being sure of the strength of his faith, boasted that even if all the rest of the disciples deserted Jesus, he would not. (Matthew 26:33-35)

Despite his confidence, Peter's faith failed. Jesus told Peter that before the rooster crowed, he would deny Jesus.

Around thirty years later, Peter is writing his last letter to the Church. Jesus has informed Peter that he will soon be exiting this world, and Peter is concerned that we understand how to have an "abundant" entry into the kingdom of heaven. As he writes his reminder, Peter remembers the tests of faith he went through.

We also must go through trials. Our faith must be tested to be strengthened just as Peter's faith was tried, refined, and tested. In 2 Peter 2:16-21, Peter gives us three pillars to strengthen our faith.

The first pillar is eyewitness testimony.

2 Peter 2:16 says:

2 Peter 1:16 (NKJV) For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

Many accuse the Church of inventing the gospel and fabricating its details, some even going as far as questioning whether there was a historical Jesus.

Indeed, some have fabricated tales and gospels. For example, the Mormon church follows cunningly devised fables, as do the Mohammedans. However, there is a vast difference between these religions and Biblical Christianity. Apart from what the Bible says about itself, there is an abundance of historical and archeological evidence to support the claims of the Bible. It is not within the scope of our time here to cover these details. One source that lists much evidence is Evidence that Demands a Verdict, by Josh McDowell. There are many others, but McDowell has done an excellent job of compiling the evidence.

Peter mentions one piece of evidence that is probably the strongest. That is, Peter and the gospel writers were eyewitnesses. Histories written by unbelievers like Josephus and Tacitus confirm what the gospel writers recorded, and the records that were written have all the marks of authentic eyewitness accounts.

All the Apostles, except for John, were killed because they refused to change their story. Now, we know that some people are convinced enough of lies that they are willing to die for what they believe. However, if the Apostles had fabricated their accounts, they would have known they were dying for lies. None of them were willing to die before the resurrection. They deserted Jesus and fled. However, after the resurrection, they all were ready to die for what they knew to be the truth. If they knew it was a lie, at least one of them, most likely all of them, would have confessed that the story was made up.

In other words, one cannot find more reliable eyewitness testimony than what we have in the New Testament.

However, Peter is saying eyewitness testimony alone is not enough. He says that they (Peter, James, and John) saw Jesus' majesty on the mountain, but even after having witnessed that miracle, Peter's faith failed in the moment of trial. Therefore, while eyewitness testimony is a necessary pillar of support, God has provided an additional pillar.

Peter calls the second pillar "the prophetic word." 2 Peter 1:19 says:

2 Peter 1:19 (NKJV) 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;

The phrase "we have the prophetic word confirmed" has an alternate translation. Some Bibles will have one or other of the possible translations in the footnotes. The old King James Version says, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy."

The New King James Version footnotes have, “We also have the more sure prophetic word.” The idea of the eyewitness accounts “confirming” the prophetic word is an interpretation (what the translators think the author means). The statement “a more sure word of prophecy” is a more literal translation (closer to the original statement). Theologically, “the more sure prophetic word” (the more literal translation) makes more sense. “Sure” in this case could also be translated as “stable.”

This is a big deal because eyewitnesses can be “*duped*” (tricked). However, prophecies written hundreds of years before giving the exact sequence of events cannot be faked.

Let me construct an example for you. Let’s imagine there was a story published in all the newspapers in Europe in 1850 stating that on July 20, 1969, a man named Neil Armstrong would walk on the moon. Now that would be truly incredible, and it would be impossible to fake because we said “all the newspapers in Europe.” In other words, it would be impossible for someone living after 1969 to go back in time and put such a detail into “all of the newspapers.” A crooked person might fake a couple of newspapers, but if a person dug into the history, it would not take long to disprove such a wild claim.

There are hundreds of details of Jesus’ life prophesied in the Old Testament and hundreds of copies of those prophecies in ancient texts that predate Jesus. I hope you are following me because one cannot fake this stuff. The historical, physical evidence is there. It cannot be faked. (Of course, those who wish to insist that miracles cannot possibly happen go to great lengths to try and make this kind of evidence of away.)

If you want to know the truth, Peter says:

2 Peter 1:19 (NKJV) And so we also have the more sure prophetic word, **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**

A light shining in a dark place makes visible things that would otherwise be hidden. The prophetic word helps us see what we otherwise would not be able to see. The prophetic word helps us to know the truth. We will need this light until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts. The “day” is Christ’s return and the “morning star” is Jesus. When Jesus returns, and we see Him face to face, our need for faith will not be the same. We will be **with** Him! He is the light. He is the truth! Until that time, we do well to heed the prophetic word.

Once we have established our faith based on the testimony of eyewitnesses and the written word of God, we must build upon that foundation with an additional pillar.

Peter teaches us about this pillar in verses twenty and twenty-one.

2 Peter 1:20–21 (NKJV) ²⁰knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, ²¹for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

“No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation.” While some people twist the Bible to make it say what they want, we are not free to do this. God has a specific message for us, and it is not up to us to decide what that message is. It is our job to understand the message.

However, the message was given by the Holy Spirit, and it is only understood by the help of the Holy Spirit. The Bible is not like any other book. It is not a book of opinions or of thoughts. As Peter says, “holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. As the Apostle Paul says:

2 Timothy 3:16 (NKJV) All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.

We must understand that God used human instruments to record the exact words that He wanted to say. The writers of Scripture were not like typewriters because God used their personalities, and their individual characters show in what was written. And yet, God made sure that the exact words He desired were written down.

Because of this, we do not get to change or manipulate what it says. However, we must understand that although there were many different writers spread out over many centuries, the Bible is one book. In other words, what Moses says informs and helps us to understand what Paul says, even though Paul wrote more than a thousand years after Moses.

If we do not understand something the Bible says, the best way to answer our questions is to search the Bible. Commentaries are good only as far as they direct us to a synthesis of the Bible, answering Bible questions from the Bible. Philosophical answers do not work.

I find it amazing that the more closely we stick to the Bible, the more we find we have in common. The more we are influenced by philosophy, the more divided we are.

The pillar of our faith is a knowledge of Scripture. The only way to get this is to read (or listen to) the Bible - the whole Bible. The Bible does not contradict itself, but it explains itself.

A very dear and intelligent person recently decided to read through the Bible. This person had lots of questions and would probably have been classified as an agnostic (we can't really know). So, as they were reading, they wrote down questions. Starting with Genesis, there were pages and pages of questions. After months of reading, they were in the Gospel of John and commented, "You know, if you just keep reading, the Bible answers itself."

This is true! If a person reads the whole book and pays attention, the Bible answers itself. It is not a matter of personal interpretation or opinion. Our job is to understand what God is saying, and He has given us His Holy Spirit to help us.

Once a person has accepted the truth of the testimony of the eyewitnesses and verified that faith by the even more sure testimony of Scripture, that person must solidify, maintain, and grow that faith by nurturing it with the Scriptures, the Word of God.

Please! Listening to preachers is necessary, but check everything we say against Scripture. Listen to Scripture five days a week and to preachers two days a week. That is a ratio of two and a half to one.

Daily devotions are not the "Daily Bread" devotional booklet. Daily devotions are time in the Bible. Our bodies need food daily and so do our spirits. And, the food we need is the Bible, not somebody's thoughts on the Bible, just the Bible. Pick it up, ask the Holy Spirit to help, and read it - please!