TWO LETTERS FROM PETER

How A Blustering Fisherman Snagged His Place in History

Our "Tour de Bible" rolls on. Pedaling monthly through God's Love Letter to us, we're finding truths that literally change how we live.

A Boston U. prof of vocal physiology was devoting his life to helping the deaf to speak, inspired by his deaf mother, wife and a student, one Helen Keller. Being engineering-deprived, he recruited an aide to design an apparatus for transmitting sound electronically.

One night in March 1876 Prof. Bell blurted out, “Mr. Watson, come here; I want you.” He was speaking over his new invention which forever revolutionized our lives.

One bleak afternoon in about 29 AD Jesus Christ, God's only Son, cried out, “It's finished!” His sacrificial death, nailed to a Roman cross, and His miraculous resurrection unleashed all the power required to transform your life and mine both now and for eternity.

Peter was jailed in Jerusalem for preaching about Jesus, his Mentor/Master, who by then had risen from the dead and returned to heaven. As Peter spoke, 5,000 chose to follow Jesus (Acts 4:4).

To his Jewish accusers, Peter ID'd Jesus, their long-awaited Messiah, as *"the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the very corner stone. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."* (Acts 4:11-12)

Eugene Peterson says, *"Many people think that what's written in the Bible has mostly to do with getting into heaven--getting right with God, saving their eternal souls. It does have to do with that, of course, but not mostly. It's equally concerned with living on this earth--living well, living in robust sanity."*

**THE BIBLE'S ROOTS**

*Canon* is the dusty word that describes the books recognized as God's authoritative revelation of Himself to man. Before Christ, these books were written in Hebrew by Jewish leaders inspired by God -- men like Moses, Joshua and Isaiah. 39 books were combined into one **Old Testament** about 400 BC, known then as *The Scriptures* and read in synagogues. Jesus called it *The Word of God*.

After He returned to heaven, His friends and followers wrote of His life and teachings. These men sent e-pistles to instruct and encourage new believers throughout the Middle East. These writings, 27 in all, became the **New Testament**.

In the 3rd century AD Diocletian, last of the Roman emperors who persecuted Christians, tried to burn *every* Bible. In AD 1454 John Gutenberg printed the first one, ushering in cheap, plentiful Bibles whereas before, a copy had cost a year's wages.

**"MUST I CHECK MY BRAIN AT THE DOOR?"**

Dr. Harold Hill, President of Curtis Engine, consults the U.S. space program. He says astronauts and space scientists at Green Belt, MD *"were checking the position of the sun, moon and planets in space, where they'd be 100 and 1000 years from now. …They ran the computer back and forth over the centuries and…found there's a day missing in space in elapsed time."*

Someone had a solution: *"'In Sunday School they talked about the sun standing still.' … He got a Bible and turned to Joshua (10:8-14) …There they found the Lord saying to Joshua, 'Don't be afraid of (the armies of five Amorite kings) for they're already defeated! I've given them to you to destroy.'*

*"… Joshua was concerned because he was surrounded by the enemy, and if darkness fell, they'd overpower them. So he asked the Lord to make the sun stand still! … (The Bible says), 'And the sun and the moon didn't move until the Israeli army had destroyed its enemies!*

"… (Joshua continues), *'There'd never been such a day before, and there's never been another since, when the Lord stopped the sun and moon -- all because of the prayer of one man.'"*

Next, the scientists *"checked the computers … and found it was close but not close enough. The elapsed time that was missing back in Joshua's day was 23 hours and 20 minutes--not a whole day. They read the Bible, and there it was -- 'So the sun stopped in the heavens and stayed there for almost 24 hours.' These little words in the Bible are important, but they were still in trouble because if you cannot account for 40 minutes, you'll still be in trouble 1,000 years from now. Forty minutes had to be found because it can be multiplied many times over in orbits."*

As the employee who'd recalled Joshua *"thought about it, he remembered somewhere in the Bible it said the sun went BACKWARDS. The scientists told him he was out of his mind, but they read 2 Kings (20:8-11). Hezekiah, on his deathbed, was visited by the prophet Isaiah who told him he was not going to die. Hezekiah asked for a sign as proof. Isaiah said, 'Do you want the shadow on the sundial to go forward 10 points or backward 10 points?' Hezekiah said, 'The shadow always moves forward; make it go backward.' Isaiah spoke to the Lord, and the Lord brought the shadow 10 degrees BACKWARD!' Ten degrees is exactly 40 minutes! Twenty three hours and 20 minutes in Joshua, plus 40 minutes in 2 Kings make the missing day in the universe!"*

Will God's Word pass the litmus tests of science? Si, right down to a few minutes that had been "mislaid" 14 centuries before Christ!

**FIRST PETER**

Peter's first letter was written about AD 64 to "the strangers scattered abroad"\* to assure these Jewish and Gentile Christians facing severe persecution that Christ in your life now -- and the assurance of being with Him forever in heaven -- can give you power and perspective to endure. These troubles, he promised, would only make them stronger as they declared their faith in Christ. Even to us today, Peter's counsel makes good sense.

***ThenGodsaid.com*** says Peter wrote this letter from Babylon, a major seat of Jewish learning on the Euphrates in 1st century AD. Some historians say Peter went to Rome, either ordered by Nero, or voluntarily to console Christians suffering Nero's persecution (AD 64-67) which resulted in Paul's martyrdom in about AD 66.

Peter was the rowdiest of Christ's 12 disciples. Born Simon, in northern Palestine on the Sea of Galilee (on which both he and Christ *walked* -- Matt. 4:18-22), he and his brother Andrew were fishermen. Pete was a rugged biker-type, yet insecure.

Convinced by John the Baptist that Jesus was the Messiah, Andrew introduced Peter to Jesus. Instantly the Lord named him Cephas (Aramaic for the Greek *Petros*, or Peter), which means "a mass of rock detached from the living rock."

After Christ returned to heaven, and after the arrival of the Holy Spirit during the Festival of Pentecost, Peter matured into a humble but intrepid evangelist, ready to face prison, torture and death, just to announce that Jesus truly was the Messiah who came to make salvation available to all. Thousands who heard this "fisher of men" came to faith in Christ.

Jesus told him (Matt. 16:13-20), "You are Peter (*Petros*, masculine, a large piece of rock), and on this rock (*petra*, feminine, a mighty, mass of rock like Gibraltar) I will build my Church." Some assume Peter was to be the head of the Church; others say Christ referred to Himself as "the Rock," or "chief cornerstone" on whom He'd build His Church (Eph. 2:20, Isa. 28:16, I Cor. 3:11, I Pet. 2:6-8).

Soon afterwards Christ sternly rebuked Peter for disputing Him, saying, "Get behind me, Satan" (Matt. 16:21-23). Just as many believe Jesus wasn't elevating Peter to the head of His Church, neither was He calling him the Devil.

There's no record of Peter's ever claiming an exalted position. In fact, the Bible says he was *sent* by the apostles in Jerusalem where James, Jesus' half brother, *not* Peter, was the leading bishop. Rather than view him as infallible, Paul even reprimanded Peter.

Peter was held in Rome's Mamertine dungeon, then crucified in 68 AD, the year Nero committed suicide. Declaring himself to be unworthy to be executed like Christ, Peter chose to die upside down.

The believers to whom Peter wrote were being persecuted for not worshiping heathen deities and for not living the pagan lifestyle. They were being seduced into greed and selfish ambition, treating each other with less than Christian love. In Rome they were burned nightly as human torches in Nero's gardens.

Peter reminds them that Christ is their example, that He's reserved untold blessings for them in heaven. Ergo, they should live in a godly way, courageous in suffering, so that even their enemies would be persuaded to follow Christ as well.

In ch. 1 Peter reminds his readers of the **PRIVILEGES** of having an intimate connection with Jesus. Let's read ch. 1.

Peter lays out the **DUTIES** that come with the privileges of knowing Christ. Veterans recall that we were taught to respect our uniforms because they represented America and all who'd died to keep us free. Peter says, since you belong to Jesus, what you do and say reflects on Him, so conduct yourself accordingly. Let's read ch. 2.

Peter continues his instructions for how to handle various relationships. This next chapter becomes, for many women-in-the-90s, a Prozac moment, so hang on, and we'll draft in behind this big fisherman. Let's read ch. 3, a dicey one that lots of ladies would just as soon delete from their Bibles!

Peter discusses **TRIALS** that inevitably result from being loyal to Christ. Over the centuries valiant souls have been tormented for following Christ. It happened this summer at Columbine High. It's rampant today in China and elsewhere. How scrawny are the "problems" we face by comparison. Entering battle, it's good to know who the enemy is as well as whose side we're on. That's how Peter wraps up this practical letter. Let's read chs. 4 and 5.

**SECOND PETER**

Peter wrote this letter just before his death. It was sent to the same audience as his first, but his intent was different. He focused now on Christlike character, the solid fact of Christ’s coming return, and condemning false teachers who are creeping into the church, spewing out their heresy about “no absolute truth” and “no consequences for our choices.” A recent George Barna survey found that 67% of self-professed, born-again Christians do not believe in absolute truth. Many of these same “believers” deny the existence of the hell which the Bible warns clearly of. To combat this undermining of our faith, knowing God's Word is Peter's antidote to religious lies. Someone said, "Shallow knowledge makes shallow Christians." As Christ's men, our strength comes not from *what* we believe but from *whom* we believe in.

Here we get the clearest light on how the Bible was written. Although it may seem that the earth will last forever, Peter's heads-up is that God has pledged to destroy it, not by water as He did in Noah's day, but by fire (Micah 1:4; Isaiah 24 and 34). Let's read this letter's key verses: ch. 1:20-21 and ch. 3:3 -13.

In his final chapter, sensing his death was near, Peter expressed his love for those who are safe **in** Christ and those who are lost **outside** of Christ. Why has Jesus *not* returned to take His followers with Him to heaven yet, despite this event's having been prophesied 2,000 years ago? Peter says it's because God doesn't want anyone to spend eternity without Him in a place the Bible calls hell (Matt 13:49-50, Rev. 20:11-15). God's been waiting 20 centuries, but the Scriptures say Christ could return any minute.

Jesus surrendered His life on the cross as the ultimate Sacrifice for your sins and mine. Because of that Sacrifice, God the Father has completely forgiven us **ALL** of our sins. That's a gift **NONE** of us deserves; it's purely the result of His mercy and grace. Yet, like any gift, it's not ours 'til we receive it.

Jesus put it in Mr. Rogers terms (John 3:36): *"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."*

Our being here today is no accident. God is inviting each of us to accept the free gift of His love and forgiveness. Why not do it today? Let's conclude by reading ch. 3.

\* (See page 3 above, last paragraph) In 586 BC Babylonia's King Nebuchadnezzar overran Palestine and deported most of its inhabitants across the Arabian desert to Babylon to be held captive 'til released by Persian King Cyrus the Great in 538 BC. Many exiles returned to their homeland; most remained. Others settled in Egypt, Turkey and southern Europe.

In AD 70 Titus and 60,000 Roman soldiers leveled Jerusalem, slaying 1.1 million Jews. Many Jewish prisoners were taken to Rome. From there these Ashkenazim Jews migrated across Europe. Propelled by Islam, Jews in Egypt moved west across North Africa into Spain. Expelled in the 15th century, these Sephardic Jews spread from Turkey to the Americas. In the 1800s and 1900s hordes of European Jews came to North America. Following World War II others returned to Israel. *All* uprooted Jews are known as the Diaspora (Greek for "to scatter apart").

(Jewish historian Josephus describes Titus’ siege of Jerusalem at: *http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/*

*shows/religion/maps/primary/josephussack.html*)

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