

Our Firm Foundation  
 2 Peter 1:16-21  
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The Constitution of the United States of America is perhaps the greatest form of democratic government ever written down by mankind. I know that technically we have a republic and not a pure democracy. Regardless of how you feel about the U.S. right now, you must agree that our experiment with liberty and freedom is one of the greatest in history. Who would not want to see that? It would be a once in a lifetime experience.

So, here is my question. If someone offered you the choice of going back in time, being with the Founding Fathers of our nation in 1787, and watching them develop and write the U.S. Constitution OR having the written version of the Constitution that governed how you lived, which would you choose? Most people would choose the amazing experience of observing the development and writing of the Constitution. Who would not want the experience of witnessing history as opposed to having the written text of the Constitution?

Consider this, if you were offered the choice of either being on Mount Hermon with Jesus where you could witness Moses and Elijah talking to Jesus (then you could see Jesus' shine with the glory of God and hearing the voice of God affirming Jesus as the Messiah) OR having the words and text of the Old Testament; which would you choose? Most of us would choose to see the glory of Jesus Christ as He stood talking with Moses and Elijah and hearing God's voice from Heaven.

However, Peter tells us that to choose experience over the text of the Word of God is the lesser choice. Why? Because experience can only do so much. Eventually, experiences fade, but the Word of God endures forever. Another problem with experiences is that as they fade, they produce the craving for another experience. Then we find ourselves living from one experience to another.

Here is my point; we do not need the experience of a spiritual high to have a firm spiritual foundation in Christ. What we need is to read the written Word of God. The Scripture is our firm foundation.

In vv. 1-15, Peter wants us to know our salvation! Now in vv. 16-21 he calls us to know our Scripture. Peter does not want the foundation of our lives to be built on emotions or experiences but on Scripture. Emotions are unreliable, and experiences fade, but the Word of God is a firm foundation that lasts for eternity.

Remember, Peter was concerned about false teachers who were misleading the churches. They were saying that since Jesus had not returned that He would never return. Therefore, they should give up living godly lives and pursue lives of pleasure and sensuality.

Peter does not want us to be deceived. He wants us to have a firm foundation under our spiritual feet, so he calls us to do two things: First: trust the witness of the apostles. Second, and most importantly, trust the witness of Scripture.

I. We can trust the witness of the Apostles (vv. 16-18)

The apostles were eyewitnesses to the glory and majesty of Christ, so we can trust in their witness. Listen to vv. 16-18:

*For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. <sup>17</sup> For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," <sup>18</sup> we ourselves heard this very voice borne from Heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.*

The first point Peter is making is that Jesus' first coming was fact. He and the other apostles saw the glory of God in Jesus. He is saying he saw it with his own eyes. Then, to drive his point home, Peter tells about his experience when he, James, and John climbed Mt. Hermon with Jesus and witnessed Jesus being transfigured into the pure glory of God. Listen to Matthew 17:1-8:

*And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John, his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. <sup>2</sup> And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. <sup>3</sup> And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. <sup>4</sup> And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." <sup>5</sup> He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." <sup>6</sup> When the disciples heard this,*

*they fell on their faces and were terrified. <sup>7</sup> But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." <sup>8</sup> And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.*

*Peter tells us this story because he wants us to know that he and the other apostles didn't just hear about Jesus' transfiguration or make it up. No! They were eyewitnesses to Jesus' majesty and glory when Jesus.*

*When Peter wrote his letter, there were other apostles who were alive so they could verify that Peter was telling the truth or call him out for lying. Yet, they did not deny it. They affirmed what Peter taught.*

*The fact is Jesus coming to earth is not the stuff of legend. It is not a myth like Greek mythology. It is not a fable like Aesop's Fables. It is not a fictional story. Jesus coming to earth was and is a verifiable fact.*

*Peter wanted Christians to be confident that Jesus had come to earth. He wanted Christians to know that he and the other apostles saw Jesus crucified. He wanted Christians to know that over 500 had witnessed Jesus' resurrection from the dead. The Apostle Paul wanted the same thing, so he wrote in 1 Cor. 15:1-7:*

*Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, <sup>2</sup> and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you— unless you believed in vain. <sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. <sup>6</sup> Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.*

It was no secret who Jesus was and that He came and lived a sinless life, died on the cross to pay for the sins of His people, was buried in a tomb, and then rose from the dead on the third day.

Paul tells us there were 500 eyewitnesses to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Let's say you took the 500 witnesses, put them on the witness stand, and let them give five-minutes to testify. That would be over 40 hours of testimony verifying that Jesus was alive. More than enough to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus lived, was crucified and rose from the dead. Paul's point is that any of the 500 witnesses that were still alive could disprove his assertion, but they did not. Why? Because he was telling the truth.

Now, think about this. The Apostle Peter had been arrested for preaching the gospel. From Jerusalem to Asia Minor to Rome, Peter had proclaimed that Jesus was the Christ who came from Heaven as God's Son. He preached that Jesus' death on the cross fulfilled Old Testament prophecy. He preached that Jesus had risen from the dead on the third day as He said He would. Peter was put in prison, and he was on death row for preaching the gospel. Peter was probably only days away from experiencing one of the most horrible executions imaginable. Eventually, he would be crucified upside down for preaching the gospel. But here is the thing, all Peter had to do to avoid execution was recant his story. If he recanted, he would be a free man. However, he did not do it.

Why? Why would Peter and all of the apostles die for their faith in Jesus and for preaching the gospel? They died because the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ is true. Friends, people do not die for cleverly devised myths, fables, fairy tales, legends, fictional stories, and lies.

Think about it this way. Let's say you want to invent a new religion, so you lie and make up this new religion. Then someone comes along and says prove it. You tell more lies and then he calls you a liar and throws you in prison for inventing a new religion. The government threatens to kill you for what you are preaching if you don't recant your beliefs. What do you do? You know it is a lie, and you don't want to die, so you back off and tell them you were just kidding. Friends, the apostles, and the 500 who saw Jesus didn't do that.

So, if you are here and you are not a Christian, the question is, will you repent of your sin of unbelief? The gospel of Jesus Christ is real; will you trust Jesus?

Brothers and sisters in Christ, do you bear witness to the reality of Jesus Christ to the lost? Are you sharing the good news of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection with others no matter what it may cost you? Peter put his neck in the noose for the gospel. We may have to do the same thing eventually, but for now, we have the freedom to share Christ. Are you doing that?

II. We can trust the Witness of Scripture (vv. 19-21)

Verses 19-21 points us to a firmer foundation. You might be wondering: How can we have a firmer foundation than Peter and the apostles' eyewitness?

That is a great question, but before I explain, let me re-read v. 19. As I read it, see if you can figure out why I would say there is a firmer foundation than their eyewitness.

*And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.*

Perhaps reading v. 19 from the Amplified Bible will help:

*And we have the prophetic word [made] firmer still. You will do well to pay close attention to it as to a lamp shining in a dismal (squalid and dark) place until the day breaks through [the gloom] and the Morning Star rises (comes into being) in your hearts.*

In order to understand v. 19, we need to keep Peter's purpose for writing this letter in mind. Remember, Peter urged us to increase in knowledge, godliness, and grace because of the danger of false teaching.

First, Peter says, "And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed." The phrase "the prophetic word" refers to the Old Testament. He is telling us that the Old Testament prophesied the Messiah would come and that Jesus fulfilled that prophecy. The transfiguration of Jesus on Mt. Hermon and God's voice from Heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him" was Jesus' coronation as the Son of God and the promised King.

Here is Peter's point in v. 19. He is saying, "You know as amazing as my experience was on Mt. Hermon with Jesus, Moses, Elijah, and hearing the voice of God, here is something even more sure than my experience—the fulfillment of God's word. Here it is in black and white. Read it because the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy is a more fully confirmed word. It is a firmer foundation."

The Old Testament prophecies said that the Messiah would come and be born of a virgin in Bethlehem; He would be the Son of David; He would go to Egypt and then be called out of Egypt. They said He would come from Nazareth in Galilee. They said He would fulfill the Law and the Prophets for His people. They said He would be the holy, righteous, Son of God. Isaiah says that the LORD would lay our iniquities on the Messiah. Isaiah goes on to say that like a Lamb led to the slaughter, the Messiah would die for our griefs, sorrows, transgressions, iniquities, and sin. The New Testament confirms that Jesus is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. Old Testament prophecies teach us that as Jonah was in the belly of the whale and came out alive three days likewise, Jesus would be buried in the heart of the earth and come out alive three days later.

Friends listen to me. There are hundreds more Old Testament prophecies that confirm that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life. This is the word of God that we must pay close attention to it.

Look at the phrase dark place in v. 19. The Greek word "dark place" is an unusually strong word. Peter is saying this dark place in which we live is like a sunburnt, thirsty, squalid, gloomy dungeon of a world. It leaves us empty, broken, thirsty, and hopeless. When you do not have Jesus, this world feels like a prison; however, if we pay attention to God's word, we will have light because God's word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

Notice what he says next in v. 19, "until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." "Until the day dawns" refers to the Day of the Lord in the Old Testament. "The Day of the Lord" is Old Testament language for Jesus' return. When that Day dawns, King Jesus will be on the throne judging the people of all ages. The Day of the Lord is a day of judgment for some and of salvation for others.

What kind of day will that be for you? Will it be a day of judgment because you ignored the gospel and didn't trust in Jesus, or will it be a day of joy and salvation because you trusted Jesus.

When Peter says that when the day dawns and the Morning Star rises in your hearts, he means that finally, then the knowledge of your salvation and the knowledge of Scripture that is in your heart will reach its consummation when you see the Lord Jesus Christ. That will be a glorious day! That will be a day of joy and celebration! If you belong to Jesus, then your heart will burst with joy and happiness.

Next, v. 20 teaches us the importance of correctly interpreting God's word. Look at what Peter says:

*"Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation."*

What Peter is doing here is going after the misinterpretations made by the false teachers. The false teachers had deviated from the truth and were playing fast and loose with God's word. They were twisting the Scripture to make it say what they wanted. Their error was that they denied Jesus' second coming. Some of the false teachers taught that Jesus had not come the first time, so there is no way there will be a second coming. Bottom line: they misinterpreted Old Testament prophecies.

Southern Seminary professor Dr. Tom Schreiner says that the false teachers in 2 Peter were not designated false teachers because they said they were recipients of some special revelation. It was not the origination of their teaching that was the issue; it was interpretation. They were false teachers because they misinterpreted the Old Testament and would not repent when confronted by Peter and the apostles.<sup>1</sup>

We often think false teachers are people who say they have received extra-biblical revelation from God. These people certainly are false teachers, but these kinds of false teachers are easy to identify.

We need to be aware that some false teachers are people who simply misinterpret the text. When confronted with their error, they will not discuss it, nor will they repent.

Friends, it is a deadly mistake to play fast and loose with biblical interpretation. One of Peter's points is that we should not listen to teachers who try to make Scripture say what they want it to say.

So, what is the best method of interpreting Scripture? Scripture is the best commentary and interpretation of Scripture. First, we must see what Scripture says about itself. Second, we learn that the apostles told us what was the proper interpretation. The apostles were given a special gift by the Holy Spirit to teach us what the Old Testament prophecies meant. They teach us how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies. They also teach us that He will return to judge the living and the dead based on how they responded to the gospel.

Do not be deceived. Jesus will return, and we will all stand before His throne. You will either be declared forgiven and righteous because of your faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God who died in your place for your sin, or you will be declared guilty of your sin thrown into the Lake of Fire for eternity.

Finally, look in v. 21. Verse 21 is the foundation of v.20,

*“For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”*

In v. 21, Peter is explaining the origination of Scripture, both negatively and positively. Negatively Peter tells us that prophecy does not originate from the will or decision of human beings. In other words, men and women do not invent Scripture or biblical prophecy. It cannot be attributed to their gifts, abilities, creativity, ingenuity, or intelligence.

Positively Peter is teaching us that prophecy or Scripture only comes from God. Notice what he said, “Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” The word we use for this verse is *inspiration*. The Holy Spirit inspired the authors to write the words of God.

Some people think *inspiration* was a mechanical process. They think that the authors fell into a trance, and God possessed them. Then God wrote or spoke through them. This is not what *inspiration* means.

Biblical *inspiration* means that the Holy Spirit inspired the authors through their personalities, literary styles, diction, experiences, and the places and times in which they lived. The authors spoke and wrote with their own styles and personalities. Their words came through, but the truth was God's.

In other words, God used the whole person to convey His truth. Their personality and gifts were not squelched or suppressed. That's the reason we see different literary styles when we read Scripture.

Bottom line: although the authors all wrote with different styles, in different dialects, in different times, and with their own personality, it does not cancel out the truth of God's word.<sup>2</sup> They all proclaimed the same truth.

Think about inspiration this way. The word “carried” in v. 21 is the Greek word “*pha-ro-ee*.” We get the word ferry from this Greek word. In essence, Peter is telling us that the biblical authors were ferried along by the Holy Spirit, and they all arrived at the same destination.

In other words, each author got on God's ferry, and each author appeared to be doing his or her own thing in their location and time period. Each one delivered his or her own distinctive word according to his or her own personality. Yet, at the same time, God, who is the Owner and Captain of the ferry, made sure they all landed together at His Port of Truth. They arrived at the Port of Truth because He was the One carrying the authors to their destination through the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup> This is how biblical inspiration of Scripture worked.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *New International Version, The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: 1, 2, Peter, Jude, Vol. 37, 323.*

<sup>2</sup> B.B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 83-96, cited by Thomas Schreiner, 324.

<sup>3</sup> David R. Helm, *Preaching the Word: 1-2 Peter, Jude*, R. Kent Hughes, editor, 219.

Brothers and sisters, when I say we have a firmer foundation, I mean God's Holy Word is a firmer foundation than the apostle's experience, and that is what Peter is telling us too. He is saying that while his experience with Jesus on Mount Hermon was amazing, that experience is incomplete without God's word. Not only is his experience incomplete the complete word of God is better than that experience. Don't crave an experience. Crave the word of God.

This is mind-boggling to think about, but here is the bottom line: The daily intake of God's word is better than being on the Mount of Transfiguration. What this means is that God's word is sufficient to meet every need you have. It is living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword. God's word is a firmer foundation.

Let's close by singing our blessing together. Take your Service Guide and turn to page 2, and we will sing **How Firm A Foundation**.

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,  
Is laid for your faith in His excellent word!  
What more can He say than to you He hath said,  
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed,  
For I am thy God, and will still give thee aid;  
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,  
Upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand.

When through the deep waters I call thee to go,  
The rivers of sorrow shall not overflow;  
For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless,  
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.

When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,  
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply;  
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design  
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.

Even down to old age all My people shall prove  
My sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love;  
And then, when grey hairs shall their temples adorn,  
Like lambs they shall still in My bosom be borne.

The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,  
I will not, I will not desert to his foes;  
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,  
I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake!<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> John Rippon, *How Firm A Foundation*, 1787, Public Domain.