

2 PETER

FAITH IN A SCEPTICAL WORLD

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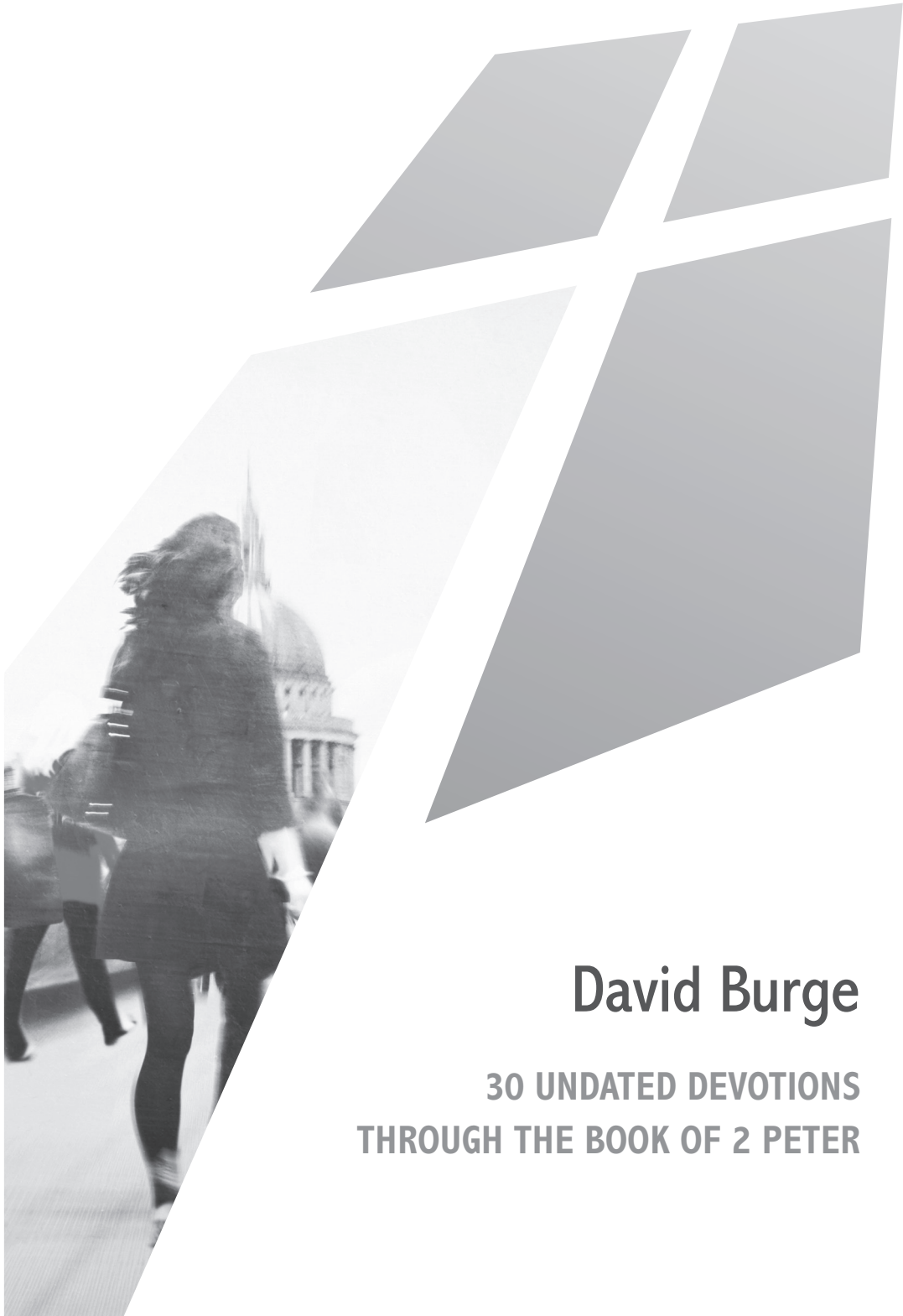
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**30 UNDATED DEVOTIONS
THROUGH THE BOOK OF 2 PETER**

INTRODUCTION

2 Peter has been one of the least appreciated books of the New Testament, yet it has so much to offer. I thank God for using this short letter to wonderfully enrich my life and to assist me in Christian ministry. I pray it will enrich your life also.

Peter, who was best friends with the God-man Jesus Christ, was understandably a man full of conviction about the truth of Christ's coming. He did not doubt the power of Christ because he saw it first-hand. He knew of Christ's love and grace because it was lived out before his own eyes. Peter proclaimed Christ's forgiveness as one so grateful for it after abandoning Jesus in the Garden. The New Testament makes it painfully clear that Peter understands Christian weakness, false starts, inadequate loyalty, misdirected zeal and shameful compromise. Many Christians aware of their own shortcomings have a special affection for Peter.

In an age of vocal atheism and scepticism, 2 Peter is a valuable gift from God. Peter assures us that our faith in Christ is very well placed. Peter was just as certain of Jesus' second powerful coming as he was of Jesus' first coming. He urges us to wait well for Christ's return, and he seeks to strengthen us against the persuasive, false voices in every generation who deny Christ's power.

May God nourish and protect your precious faith as Peter's words minister to you. And may you eagerly co-operate with Peter's intention for this letter – that you 'grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever! Amen' (3:18).

In Christ,

David Burge



DAY 1 A Powerful Little Letter: An Overview of 2 Peter

Before delving into the text of 2 Peter verse by verse, it will help if we first appreciate 2 Peter as a whole; we will look at the forest before examining the trees.

At the time of writing, false teachers are close by and have hurt churches in other places such as Corinth with their persuasive misuse of Scripture, their distortions of the gospel, as well as their promotion of false wisdom and loose morals. In 2 Peter, we see the pre-emptive strike of Peter the shepherd to defend the flock. Peter was specifically charged by Jesus with the duty of tending his sheep, a role that we know he took seriously (John 21; 1 Pet. 5).

How does 2 Peter defend and strengthen the Christians?

First, in chapter 1 Peter assures Christians that our faith in Christ is absolutely legitimate, built upon reliable knowledge of His power and coming (vv. 1–2, 16). He died for the forgiveness of our sins (v. 9) and will one day welcome His people into His eternal kingdom (v. 11). Peter reminds us of these core gospel truths (vv. 12–15), and urges us to become more established in them (v. 12), adding to our faith the traits that lead to growth: goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love (vv. 5–7). Such traits will not only render us well established for the rest of our lives, but will also mean we cannot help but live fruitful and effective lives in Christ's service (vv. 10–11). In chapter 1 then, Peter offers Christians a vaccine against the allurements of the false teachers. The traits Peter endorses are antonyms of the lifestyle the false teachers will promote, meaning that those who heed Peter's letter will find repulsive

what might otherwise have entangled and overcome them.

Second, in chapter 2 Peter warns the sheep by describing what the wolves look like – clever in their deception (vv. 1–3), corrupt in their behaviour, ignorant of essential truths, and selfishly motivated (vv. 10–16). However, their demise is certain because Jesus will return to judge (vv. 4–9). On that day their so-called prosperity and freedom will be exposed as mere illusions (vv. 17–22).

Third, in chapter 3 – since it is Jesus' powerful return that motivates godly living in chapter 1, and threatens those who oppose Christ's ways in chapter 2 – Peter considers it important to assure his readers that Jesus will return despite what some say to the contrary (vv. 1–10). The false teachers deny that Christ will come in power to judge the world, but Peter, who has already witnessed the power and first coming of Jesus, knows that Jesus will complete His unfinished business according to His promise (v. 7). Those who oppose Him will suffer destruction; those who are waiting well for Him will be led to their eternal 'home of righteousness' in the new heavens and new earth (vv. 11–13).

REFLECTION

Have you given much thought to the importance of Peter in the Gospels, Acts and letters of the New Testament? Why was he given such a role, including his failures, successes and development?

Some letters are considered valuable because of the identity of the author, whether it be a Prime Minister, President or celebrity.

The first line of 2 Peter assures us that we have before us something very special. Here is a message from Simon Peter, the close friend of Jesus who went from being a fisherman to the prominent Apostle and rock of God's church (Matt. 16:18). This author had vivid memories of the living, crucified, and then resurrected God-man, Jesus Christ. He is writing to churches near the end of his life with a message he deemed critically important. Right up until the end of his life, around 64–65 AD, Peter saw himself as 'a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ' (v. 1).

In verses 1–2 Peter sweepingly endorses some of the great doctrines of the Christian faith. Without explanation, he refers to our 'precious' faith, to 'grace and peace' through our 'knowledge of God and of Jesus', and by referring to Jesus as our 'Saviour'.

Significantly, verse 1 is one of the few verses in the New Testament that explicitly calls Jesus 'God' when Peter says, 'our God and Saviour Jesus Christ'. When combined with verse 2, we are struck that while Jesus is called God in verse 1, He is in the same breath described as being distinct from God when Peter says, 'through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord'. He describes one God (v. 1) in two persons (v. 2). Peter knew first-hand what it was like to live with One who was truly

human, distinct from the Father; and yet truly God. He walked and talked with the man Jesus, but was also terrified by His divine power: 'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!' (Luke 5:8).

And yet, Peter says that the believers' faith is 'as precious' as his own in verse 1. He believed by sight, and we without sight. This faith of equal worth as Peter's means we receive the very same 'grace and peace' as Peter through our knowledge of God the Father and Son.

Has it ever dawned on you that while you live in a place and time far removed from the first-century world of Peter, your faith in Him is equally precious to that of the Apostles? Jesus is no longer physically with us, but 'we're in' with Jesus, as Peter was, through our common faith.

REFLECTION

What encouragement and boldness can you draw from belonging to Jesus' 'band of brothers and sisters' in your time and place? In verse 1 Peter refers to our faith, and in verse 2 to our knowledge. How are faith in Christ and knowledge of Christ complementary?