

# **PILGRIMS, JUST PASSING THROUGH A Study of 1&2 PETER and JUDE**

## **PILGRIMS, JUST PASSING THROUGH**

### **1 & 2 PETER and JUDE**

It was a shaky time for Christians in the Roman Empire. In A.D. 68 Emperor Nero saw himself surrounded by political enemies and took the easy way out: suicide. In the next year three emperors, in rapid succession, took his place but couldn't hold the job. So in A.D. 69 troops proclaimed the military leader Vespasian as emperor—and saw that he stayed there.

Vespasian hated Jews, and he counted Christians among them. Prior to becoming emperor his goal had been to trample Judea and erase it from existence. As emperor he sent his oldest son, Titus, to finish the job. Titus put Jerusalem under siege for three months. Then he tightened the noose. Troops leveled buildings to the ground. The temple became a crumble of stones. Jerusalem fell. Jews (and Christians) became Roman captives.

Aftershocks vibrated throughout the Roman Empire, blending with the general persecution against “atheists” (people who refused to worship Roman gods) that Nero had begun. Christians everywhere suffered. They were driven from their homes, deported to the outer borders of the empire, forbidden to worship openly and, worse yet, splintered by their own internal doctrinal disputes.

It is possible that the apostle Paul was martyred under Nero. And Peter was martyred as well crucified upside down, tradition says, because he felt unworthy to die in the same position as his Lord. It was a dark season for Christians.

How were they to endure?

## **THE LETTERS**

Peter and Jude, through God's inspiration, sensed this coming darkness. If conservative scholars are correct, Peter's first letter can be dated about A.D. 64, probably written from the city of Rome—which Peter called Babylon in 5:13. Peter's second letter refers appreciatively in 3:15–16 to Paul's letters but bears no hint that Paul is dead. On the other hand, Peter seems to anticipate his own death—soon (see 2 Peter 1:13–14). Scholars therefore date this letter in the sixties as well—but closer to the end of the decade. Jude, the half-brother of Jesus Christ, wrote in the same era. In fact, much of the information in Jude is also found in 2 Peter 2. All three letters aim at preparing Christians for hardship.

But these are not bleak letters. Indeed they are full of hope and practical counsel on how to endure. They tell us to balance holy living with correct doctrine, to nurture spiritual growth, to work within existing authority structures and to take care of each other.

These letters do not tell us how to escape suffering but rather to expect it. They show us that in the midst of suffering we can enjoy our fellowship with other believers and look forward to a new heaven and a new earth, a “home of righteousness,” with an end to pain.

These letters, sent with prophetic love to first-century Christians, still live today. They are a compass for our own dark road.

# SESSION 1

## Strangers in the World

### *1 Peter 1:1–12*

I believe it's safe to say all of us have experienced times when we didn't fit in: arriving overdressed (or underdressed) for a social occasion, not knowing the language spoken around us, being in a setting as a minority race or gender, holding a single dissenting opinion in a hotly debated topic. But underneath these embarrassing and painful moments sometimes lurks a pervasive sense that maybe we don't fit anywhere really.

**LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION.** Can you recall a time when you felt out of place like a stranger who did not belong?

**PERSONAL REFLECTION.** If you knew you were about to enter a difficult set of circumstances that would test your faith, how would you prepare yourself?

Early Christians were subject to many kinds of isolation. Though their faith originated in Judaism, the Jews rejected them because Christians saw Jesus as Messiah. Romans would eventually use Christians as scapegoats, blaming them for all sorts of political woes. And pagans saw Christians as atheists because they insisted on worshipping only one God. In this setting, Peter offers beleaguered first-century Christians (and us) a different kind of belonging. *Read 1 Peter 1:1–12.*

1. Imagine you are one of the early Christians receiving Peter's letter. After studying this opening section, what would motivate you to keep reading?

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2. Study Peter's description of the people who were about to receive his letter (vv. 1–2). How does his description of them help explain why they were "strangers in the world"?

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3. How does the introduction to Peter's letter help you appreciate the three persons of God?

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## **PILGRIMS, JUST PASSING THROUGH A Study of 1&2 PETER and JUDE**

**4.** Peter says that God has given his people “new birth.” What does he say grows out of that new birth (vv. 3–5)?

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**5.** Peter says in verse 6, “Now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.” If you were to hear that kind of message, what information in this paragraph might help you through the suffering (vv. 3–9)?

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**6.** How does the future as Peter describes it here offer you hope in your own setting?

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**7.** What did Peter believe to be true of genuine faith (vv. 7–9)?

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**8.** Peter complimented his readers because they believed in Jesus and loved him—even though they had not seen him (v. 8). What questions do you think people today have to cope with because they have not personally seen Jesus?

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**9.** When have you seen Jesus (through a person or event) in a way that increased your faith?

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**10.** By what different routes did news of salvation come to the readers of Peter’s letter (vv. 10–12)?

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**11.** In what ways are Christians special—even when compared to Old Testament prophets and angels?

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## PILGRIMS, JUST PASSING THROUGH A Study of 1&2 PETER and JUDE

12. Peter refers to new birth, or salvation, throughout this passage as a central difference between Christians and the world. What tensions have you experienced because of this difference?

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13. How does God's gift of salvation help you cope with these tensions?

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*Pray thanking God that you belong to him and that you have an eternal home with him and his people. If you have not yet come into God's family, ask (if you are able) that he continue to show you the way.*

### **Now or Later**

Review some of the people who came to mind as you considered question 9, people who have increased your faith. Write a letter of appreciation to one of them. If this is not possible, write a prayer of thanks to God for that person's influence in your life.

Suffering and joy are mixed in this section of Peter's letter as they often are in our own lives. Consider the people and events that have brought you pain; consider also sources that have brought you joy. (I find it odd that they are sometimes the same sources.) In prayer, share all of this with your loving God, who understands the mixture far better than we do.

Read again 1 Peter 1:8-9. Meditate on love and joy as Peter describes them. Thank God for offering a joy that cannot be diminished by earthbound events. Then, as much as you are able, enjoy!

## SESSION 2

### Called to Be Different

*1 Peter 1:13–25*

Being a Christian shapes us sometimes in surprising ways. We discover God-given strengths and use them in ways we could not have imagined. But we also discover our flaws and learn the painful effort of overcoming those sins. God calls his people to be different: different from what they would be if they did not believe in Jesus and different from the unbelievers around them.

**LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION.** What surprising strengths (or weaknesses) have you discovered in yourself as part of your Christian growth?

**PERSONAL REFLECTION.** Think of a Christian (living or dead) you admire. In what ways has that person practiced holy living? Pray, thanking God for his or her influence in your life.

Peter opens this section of his letter with the admonition to “prepare your minds for action.”  
*Read 1 Peter 1:13–25.*

1. What mental and physical actions should a follower of Christ pursue?

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2. Peter lists several ways that followers of Jesus ought to respond to his gift of salvation. Define each of these responses more fully (vv. 13–16).

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3. Select one of these responses. If you were to put that response on the front burner of your priorities, what changes would you have to make in your life?

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4. Verse 15 says, “Be holy in all you do.” How might an honest attempt to be holy by God’s standards improve your relationships with people close to you?

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In what situations might it make you, as verse 17 says, more like a stranger?

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# PILGRIMS, JUST PASSING THROUGH A Study of 1&2 PETER and JUDE

5. Why does Peter tell us that we ought to live in “reverent fear” (v. 17)?

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6. What events from the past would help the recipients of Peter’s letter to appreciate God’s concern for them (vv. 18–21)?

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7. How could the conditions that Peter describes in verses 21–25 promote sincere love among Christians?

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8. In speaking of a Christian’s relationships, Peter drew a contrast between “love for your brothers” and being “strangers in the world” (see vv. 1, 17 and 22). When have you felt sheltered by a family kind of love among believers?

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9. What contrasts do you see in verses 21–25 between what is temporary and what is enduring?

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10. Peter links the Word of God with salvation and new birth. (Compare verses 10, 12, 23 and 25.) What do you think Peter means when he says that this Word is “enduring” and “stands forever”?

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11. The readers of Peter’s letter learned of God’s gift of salvation because it was preached to them. How have you learned about it?

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12. If you were trying to convey to someone else the value of new birth in your life, what would you want that person to know?

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## **PILGRIMS, JUST PASSING THROUGH A Study of 1&2 PETER and JUDE**

*Write out a prayer for one person you would like to introduce to Christ—and ask Jesus to present that opportunity to you.*

### **Now or Later**

Jesus gave his standard for holy living with a summary statement of the law: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength ... [and] love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:30–31). In prayerful silence ask God to reveal ways in which you fail to express love to him with your whole being. Next, ask that he bring to mind those people whom you do not favor as much as you favor yourself. Confess to God your specific failures to love in his holy way.

Jot a quick list of all you have to do today (or tomorrow). How could you begin to tackle this list with the goal “be holy in all you do” (1 Peter 1:15)?

## SESSION 3

### Do I Want to Grow Up?

*1 Peter 2:1–12*

“Would you send me to school?” [Peter] inquired craftily.

“Yes.”

“And then to an office?”

“I suppose so.”

“Soon I should be a man?”

“Very soon.”

“I don’t want to go to school and learn solemn things,” he told her passionately.

“I don’t want to be a man. O Wendy’s mother, if I was to wake up and feel there was a beard!”

“Peter,” said Wendy the comforter, “I should love you in a beard.” Mrs. Darling stretched out her arms to him, but he repulsed her.

“Keep back, lady, no one is going to catch me and make me a man.”\*

**LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION.** When have you wished, at least for a moment, that you were not an adult?

**PERSONAL REFLECTION.** What people and events has God used to move you toward maturity? Make a list or create a timeline. As much as you are able, reenter those events, and thank God for what happened then.

The apostle Peter opens this section of his letter by insisting that his readers “grow up in your salvation.” *Read 1 Peter 2:1–12.*

1. What characteristics of spiritual maturity do you find in this passage?

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2. Peter speaks here of two aspects of Christian growth: individual and corporate. How might the five inner sins of verse 1 damage our relationships with other believers?

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When have you seen this kind of damage?

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\* James M. Barrie, *Peter Pan* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1911), p. 228.

## **PILGRIMS, JUST PASSING THROUGH A Study of 1&2 PETER and JUDE**

**3.** What does the metaphor in verses 2–3 suggest about how we should nurture spiritual growth?

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**4.** How does belief or unbelief influence the way a person understands Jesus, the living Stone (vv. 4–8)?

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What are some of the effects of these differing points of view?

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**5.** What would you expect to see in a person who had imitated Jesus and become a “living stone”?

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**6.** What reasons do the people here have to praise God (vv. 9–10)?

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**7.** As you look more carefully at verse 9, think of Christians you know. What steps could you take in these Christian groups to live up to this description?

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**8.** What inner and outer battles do you see in verses 11–12?

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**9.** Verse 11 repeats a now familiar theme in 1 Peter—that Christians are aliens and strangers in the world. How might living up to the description of verse 9 cause a Christian to be alienated from the world?

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## PILGRIMS, JUST PASSING THROUGH A Study of 1&2 PETER and JUDE

10. The *New Bible Commentary* interprets verse 12, “the day [God] visits us,” as “the day God will visit the earth and search out man’s hearts in judgment.”\*\* If this were to occur in your lifetime, what evidence would you want God to find of your own spiritual growth?

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11. How could today’s passage help you overcome a tendency to be a spiritual Peter Pan?

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*Pray thanking God for specific forces he has brought into your life that have drawn you toward spiritual maturity. Ask for his care in further preparing you for the time when you will meet him face to face.*

### Now or Later

Take a prayerful look at spiritual maturity as Peter describes it in his letter. Place this alongside several areas of your life and evaluate your progress in that direction. Where appropriate, give yourself spiritual goals, noting a date when you will look back at your notes and evaluate your progress. The questions below may help guide your thinking and praying.

Malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander keep me from growing to spiritual maturity (v. 1). I need to root these out of my life by ...

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God calls me to spiritual maturity by joining me with other Christians as a “spiritual house” (v. 5), “a royal priesthood” and “a holy nation” (v. 9). I need to work on this spiritual connection with other Christians by ...

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Christian maturity means that I am never quite at home in this world. I am an alien and a stranger (v. 11) who wants to live in a way that causes even current non-Christians to “glorify God on the day he visits us” (v. 12). I will express my alien status in this world by ...

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\*\* D. Guthrie et al., eds., *The New Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1970), p. 124.

## SESSION 4

### In His Steps

*1 Peter 2:13–3:7*

In the late 1800s, Charles Sheldon wrote a novel called *In His Steps* about a dying tramp who gets involved with the Rev. Henry Maxwell and his congregation. Through their experience with the tramp, this body of believers begins to see the submissive suffering of Jesus and what it means to walk “in his steps.”

**LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION.** If you were to rate your natural inclination for being submissive on a scale of one to ten, where would you place yourself and why? (One is a mud-covered doormat; ten is a banner-waving firebrand.)

**PERSONAL REFLECTION.** As you try to follow the steps of Jesus, what do you value about that path?

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What do you find difficult about walking in his steps?

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Submission does not come easily to any of us, yet Peter thought it important and he cites Jesus Christ as an example. *Read 1 Peter 2:13–3:7.*

1. Find several examples of submission in this passage. What is difficult about each?

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2. According to Peter, why should Christians treat their governing leaders with respect (2:13–15)?

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3. How could the teachings of 2:16–17 keep you from becoming a “muddy doormat” to your government?

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## **PILGRIMS, JUST PASSING THROUGH A Study of 1&2 PETER and JUDE**

**4.** What connections does the text point out between Christ’s suffering and a Christian’s submission in the situation of slavery (2:18–21)?

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**5.** What were the effects of Christ’s suffering (2:22–25)?

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**6.** Verse 23 says that in his suffering Jesus “entrusted himself to him who judges justly.” How might a similar trust in God help you to submit to the necessary suffering that has come into your own life?

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**7.** Slowly and prayerfully reread the words of verse 24, substituting your own name for the appropriate pronouns. In what specific ways have you seen Christ’s work here played out in your own experience?

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**8.** In a society where wives rated barely above slaves, what can you find that is “progressive” about Peter’s marriage principles in 3:1–7?

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**9.** What reasons did Peter give for acting according to these principles?

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**10.** Walking “in his steps” will often lead to submission—and even to suffering. In spite of this hardship, why might you choose this route?

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**11.** What is one area in the foreseeable future where you could practice Christlike submission, and how would you do that?

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*Pray talking to God about the joy and the challenge of walking in the footprints of Jesus.*

# **PILGRIMS, JUST PASSING THROUGH A Study of 1&2 PETER and JUDE**

## **Now or Later**

Finding a balance between responsible action for healthy change and submission to authority is a constant tension for the Christian who wants to obey this passage. How can you draw together both ends of this tension? (In what situations would you take action? At what point would you submit?) Consider what you should say and do

regarding civil government

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in your job or school

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in your marriage or in other relationships

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## SESSION 5

### If I'm Living Right, Then Why Do I Hurt So Much?

#### *1 Peter 3:8–22*

We often assume a direct connection between right living and easy living. It's an added pat on the back when life runs smoothly. But when suffering strikes, that assumption becomes an unspoken accusation. We turn on ourselves and question what we have done wrong, or (conversely) we feel that God has cheated us, as if he somehow owes us payment for our good behavior.

**LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION.** Bad things happen to good people—sometimes precisely because they are doing what is right and good. Why?

**PERSONAL REFLECTION.** When have you (or when has someone close to you) suffered because of doing what you believed to be right? Prayerfully review this situation, first examining your own motives and actions. Then in prayer, place the whole event into God's care and ask him to give you further understanding of it through this study.

Peter made no promises of easy living. Sometimes suffering comes—whether or not we earn it. It came to Jesus. *Read 1 Peter 3:8–22.*

1. What descriptions of right living and of suffering do you see in this passage?

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2. Review verses 8–12. Find as many phrases as you can that describe what a Christian ought to be and do.

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3. What reasons does Peter suggest for living that way?

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4. What do you find difficult about the way of life described in verses 8–12?

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What do you find attractive about that way of living?

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## **PILGRIMS, JUST PASSING THROUGH A Study of 1&2 PETER and JUDE**

**5.** Peter knew that in spite of godly living, Christians may encounter hardship. What counsel does Peter offer for coping with suffering (vv. 13–17)?

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**6.** How could setting apart Christ as Lord, as verse 15 commands, help you endure suffering?

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**7.** Why might unbelievers be willing to listen to reasons for hope from a person who is living the way Peter describes (vv. 15–17)?

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**8.** Verse 18 is a capsule description of Christ’s work and purpose. What can you know from this verse about why Jesus came and what he accomplished?

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**9.** How was Christ’s suffering similar to what Christians can expect?

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**10.** Study the rather confusing information in verses 19–20. What is your best explanation of its meaning?

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**11.** Why are Christians baptized (see vv. 21–22)?

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**12.** Our world is often unjust. Bring to mind some of your past or current sufferings. In the context of these sufferings, how can the picture of Christ portrayed by this passage bring you hope?

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*Pray thanking God for Jesus who suffered for us, and for his presence with you in your own suffering.*

# PILGRIMS, JUST PASSING THROUGH A Study of 1&2 PETER and JUDE

## Now or Later

Meditate on three sections of this passage:

1 Peter 3:8–9

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1 Peter 3:10–12

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1 Peter 3:18

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Settle yourself into each passage at a time and place free of distractions. Focusing on one passage at a time, invite the work of God's Spirit to make these words from Peter's letter come alive in your being.

Ask God to point out significant phrases and to clarify their meaning in your mind.

Ask him to show you specific ways to bring your life into line with its teaching.

Use the text as a basis for prayer.

## SESSION 6

### Christians at Risk

#### *1 Peter 4*

Persecution is part of life for Christians around the world. In China, Christian leaders are dangled from the ceiling with weights attached to their limbs to increase their pain. In Afghanistan, twelve Christian relief workers were on trial for their lives under the accusation of “proselytizing” among Muslim refugees. In Nigeria, Christian churches are burned to the ground at the hands of angry mobs.

**LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION.** If you were the object of the persecutions cited above, what do you hope that you would do? What questions would you be asking about God? What help would you want to receive from your Christian brothers and sisters? Make some notes together, which you will use at the end of the study.

**PERSONAL REFLECTION.** When you learn of Christians suffering because of their faith, what questions come to your mind? Make a list. (You will use it at the end of this study.)

When writing his letter, Peter assumed that “the end of all things is near” (4:7), and he knew that his Christian readers were at risk—at risk for falling away from the high standards of living that Jesus had set for his followers and at risk for deep and personal suffering because of their faith. *Read 1 Peter 4:1–11.*

1. Verse 1 draws attention to our attitude. What attitudes does this chapter ask Christians at risk to adopt?

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2. According to Peter’s opening paragraph, how is a Christian different from a pagan (vv. 1–6)? (Note actions as well as attitudes.)

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3. The *New Bible Commentary* interprets verse 1 by saying that people who accept Christ’s death for their own sins are symbolically linked to his suffering. In view of verse 2, what are some practical ways that Christians might live out that symbolic link with Jesus?

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## PILGRIMS, JUST PASSING THROUGH A Study of 1&2 PETER and JUDE

4. Our doubts sometimes taunt us. “Of what use is your Christian faith? God does not protect you. When your time comes, you die like the rest.” How might the information in verses 4–6 help us deal with those doubts?

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5. Notice Peter’s beginning words in verse 7: “The end of all things is near.” What emotional response do you think these words brought to his readers?

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How do they make you feel? Why?

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6. What specific instructions does Peter give suffering Christians who are aware that the end of all things is coming (vv. 7–11)?

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7. Of what spiritual and practical value are these instructions?

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8. Verse 11 speaks of two forms of leadership in the early church: those who speak (teach) and those who serve. How would the purpose of church leadership as it is described here prevent a misuse of power between Christians?

9. Read 1 Peter 4:12–19. According to these verses, what are some right and wrong ways for a Christian to suffer?

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10. The term *Christian* is used only three times in the New Testament—here and in Acts 11:26 and 26:28. Used by outsiders, the word was probably a term of contempt, but to believers it meant “adopted into the family of Christ.” Why might a Christian expect to sometimes encounter suffering because of that name?

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## PILGRIMS, JUST PASSING THROUGH A Study of 1&2 PETER and JUDE

11. How might verse 19 be both a comfort and a challenge to a Christian who suffers because of faith?

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12. Look back to the questions you posed in the group discussion or personal reflection section. How do Peter's teachings help you deal with these questions?

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*Pray asking God to help you to "continue to do good" regardless of circumstances ahead.*

### **Now or Later**

Read the paper or watch the news looking for events that might bring suffering to Christians. Pray for your brothers and sisters there.

Consider writing to national or international authorities expressing your support for religious freedom and asking relief for Christians who are imprisoned or otherwise suffering for their faith. If you know names and locations of persecuted Christians, be as specific as you are able. As citizens of the United States we can contact our national representatives through the Internet at [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov) and [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) or write to the president at

The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave.  
Washington, DC 20500

# SESSION 7

## TLC for Trying Times

### *1 Peter 5*

Relationships bring color to life. People add sparkle and fire to our existence. Some of this sparkle is the jagged red of controversy. Some is the orderly black and white of authority structure. And some is the comfortable amber of friendship.

**LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION.** Describe one of the more difficult relationships of your past. Then describe one of your most valuable relationships and what made it valuable.

**PERSONAL REFLECTION.** Take mental stock of your current relationships. What is one of your most difficult relationships at this point? What makes it difficult? What current relationship do you value most? Why? In prayer, invite God into these relationships, asking his help where you need it and giving him thanks for those relationships that you value most.

When Peter concluded his first letter, a work that frequently points to suffering, he did not tell his readers to escape to the isolation of a spiritual or literal mountaintop. Instead, he pointed to their relationships and said, “Here’s how to take care of each other.” *Read 1 Peter 5.*

1. What various relationships do you see in this chapter?

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2. Peter speaks in verse 1 to his fellow elders. In what ways did Peter see himself as like the elders he was writing to (vv. 1–4)?

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3. If you were to use verses 1–4 to write a personality profile for a church elder, what would you include?

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4. What would you put in an elder’s job description?

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5. When have you appreciated a person who acted toward you as a spiritual elder?

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## **PILGRIMS, JUST PASSING THROUGH A Study of 1&2 PETER and JUDE**

**6.** What different beings or groups must Christians ordinarily respond to (vv. 5–11)?

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**7.** What instructions does Peter give in verses 5–9?

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**8.** What reasons did Peter give for following each of these commands?

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**9.** God’s Word speaks to us in a variety of ways. What joy, comfort or warning in Peter’s instructions (vv. 5–11) stands out to you?

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**10.** In this chapter, Peter points out three forces on our lives: other Christians, Satan and God himself. How would you summarize an appropriate response to each?

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**11.** Find as many phrases as you can that describe Peter’s own relationships and his instructions for relationships among his readers (vv. 12–14).

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**12.** Even in this last chapter of his letter, Peter three times mentions the theme of suffering. But in spite of the possibility of suffering, Peter instructs his readers in verse 12 to “stand fast” in the grace of God. How could Peter’s teachings about relationships in this chapter help you to “stand fast” in your own faith?

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*Pray thanking God for the relationship he offers you with himself.*

### **Now or Later**

Review your relationships as you outlined them in group discussion or personal reflection. What do you find in this chapter that might bring spiritual health to one of your more difficult relationships?

## **PILGRIMS, JUST PASSING THROUGH A Study of 1&2 PETER and JUDE**

Pray that God will make the necessary changes in you, then take at least one step toward healing that relationship.

Reread this chapter, looking for one or more sentences that might be God's word for you. Receive them into yourself with thanksgiving. Express your appreciation or your resolutions to your loving God.

Read verses 10–11 as a prayer of blessing, write it out inserting the name of a person you are praying for.

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## SESSION 8

### The Long Way Home

#### *2 Peter 1:1–11*

What is the way to heaven? Is it by proper knowledge of Christian doctrines? Or by godly living? Is it by faith in Christ’s gift of salvation? Or by working according to Christ’s goals and principles? Is it by God’s call to us to be his own? Or by our own endurance with God until the day we die? Weighty issues. And with them, Peter opens his second letter.

**LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION.** Scripture doesn’t give us much specific information about heaven, perhaps to allow us creativity as we look forward to that time. What are some of your favorite imaginations of heaven?

**PERSONAL REFLECTION.** We sometimes hear the apology, “Be patient with me. God isn’t finished with me yet.” What do you think God is working to accomplish in you as he prepares you for eternity with him?

After writing an earlier letter telling his readers to expect suffering as a part of this life, Peter now writes a second letter. This time he points toward the end of life: our eternal reward whether it comes at our death or at Christ’s return. *Read 2 Peter 1:1–11.*

1. Peter opens his second letter by saying that God “has given us everything we need for life and godliness” (v. 3). What does godliness look like according to these verses?

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2. What do verses 1–2 tell us about the writer and readers of this letter—and the relationship between them?

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3. In verses 1–2 we are told that we will receive the gifts of faith, grace and peace through Christ’s righteousness and knowledge of God. How does your own spiritual well-being depend in part on Christ’s righteousness and in part on your knowledge of God?

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4. Verse 3 is sometimes called the key to Peter’s second letter. What all would you expect to find in a book with this verse as an introduction?

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## **PILGRIMS, JUST PASSING THROUGH A Study of 1&2 PETER and JUDE**

**5.** Verse 3 speaks of both knowledge and holy living as a part of the Christian life. Think of the balance between knowledge of Jesus and holy living that you have seen in Christians. What happens if one area or the other is weak?

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**6.** What do Christ's power and promises give to those who accept him (vv. 1–4)?

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**7.** Peter writes in verse 4 that because of God's promises, Christians "may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world." What does he then expect believers to do to nurture their own holy living (vv. 5–7)?

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**8.** How are knowledge of Jesus and godly living related to each other (vv. 8–9)?

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**9.** Select one of the Christian qualities mentioned in verses 5–7 that you would like to have become more prominent in your own life. If you were to practice this quality more faithfully, how would it help you escape the pollution of evil influences around you?

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How would it complement your knowledge of Jesus Christ?

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**10.** What do you think it means for a person to be called and elected by God (vv. 10–11)?

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**11.** What is the normal effect of this call and election on a person's life and future?

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## SESSION 9

### If I Should Die ...

#### *2 Peter 1:12–21*

Joe Bayley was a devout Christian who influenced many for Christ through his writing (especially a book titled *Heaven*) and, more important, through his life. Ten years after writing *Heaven*, he lay on a gurney outside an operating room, waiting to undergo heart surgery. At Mayo’s famed Methodist Hospital, this surgery was routine. Joe expected to be walking around the hospital hallways in a few days. But he wasn’t. Instead, hours later, Joe walked into eternity.

**LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION.** If you thought you might be conveying a final message to people you hoped would continue in their Christian faith, who would you speak or write to?

What would you want them to know?

Where would you refer them for continued support of their faith?

**PERSONAL REFLECTION.** Who has been a spiritual rock for you, a person (perhaps a biblical writer) who helped you believe and keep on believing? Offer your thanks to God for that person.

Peter’s second letter was one of his final works. Peter knew that this letter might be his last words to those who read it. So he reminded them of the source of their faith and directed them to a variety of reference points that could help them to keep on believing. *Read 2 Peter 1:12–21.*

1. Peter says, “I think it is right to refresh your memory” (v. 13). What people and events does he remind them of (vv. 16–21)?

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2. What responsibilities did Peter seem to feel he had for his readers (vv. 12–15)?

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3. What phrases here create a picture of Peter’s view of death?

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Based on these phrases, how would you describe Peter’s attitude about death?

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## **PILGRIMS, JUST PASSING THROUGH A Study of 1&2 PETER and JUDE**

**4.** What do you hope will be your own feelings when you approach death?

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**5.** What could you be doing during your lifetime to build toward a “good death”?

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**6.** In verses 16–18 Peter refers to Christ’s transfiguration. Read Matthew 17:1–8. In what different ways did this event show Christ’s majesty?

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**7.** What difference would it make to those who knew Peter that his teachings about Jesus came from “eyewitnesses of his majesty”?

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**8.** What difference does it make to you that God said of Jesus, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” (Matthew 17:5).

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**9.** What does 2 Peter 1:19–21 show about the origin and purpose of Scripture?

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**10.** What are some ways that you can show an appropriate respect for Scripture?

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**11.** Peter did not want his readers to be so dependent on him that their faith would fall apart after his death. (Perhaps he knew that some new believers depend too much on other Christians.) So here Peter pointed to the only basis for real faith: Jesus Christ as he is revealed in Scripture. Who would you like to influence with your faith in your lifetime, and how can you best go about it?

*Pray for those who came to your mind as you reflected on the question above. Ask God to create opportunities that will lead to shared faith. Then prepare yourself to do so.*

# **PILGRIMS, JUST PASSING THROUGH A Study of 1&2 PETER and JUDE**

## **Now or Later**

Peter says that his readers should pay attention to the prophets “as a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns” (v. 19). Read and meditate on several prophets who spoke of Christ. Thank God for what you find there.

Isaiah 40:1–11

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Isaiah 53:1–12

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Micah 5:2–5

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Zechariah 9:9

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Revelation 21:22–22:7

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## SESSION 10

### Follow Which Leader?

#### *2 Peter 2*

Is anything true, really? Is Christianity whatever you want it to be, or are there realities in the Christian faith that make anything less than those truths non-Christian? In an age where many people think that a good religion is any belief that brings you comfort, the apostle Peter's voice sounds a strident objection: Some beliefs are true Christianity. And some beliefs are false and therefore not Christian at all. He challenges his readers to learn the difference.

**LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION.** Some religions are almost Christian but not quite. When and how have you come in contact with one of these belief systems? What concerns did this encounter raise in your mind?

**PERSONAL REFLECTION.** Consider sources you use to shape your concept of what is truly Christian: Scripture? ancient confessions, creeds and catechisms? religious books? spiritual leaders? Evaluate the reliability of these sources, how you choose them, on what basis you interpret Scripture and what cautions you have in place to protect yourself from falling into a form of Christianity that is less than genuine. Pray about your observations.

As Peter continues preparing his readers to hang onto their faith without him, he addresses the dangers of heresy and "false teachers" who tempt Christians their direction. *Read 2 Peter 2.*

1. This chapter is like a danger signal along a treacherous road leading to heresy. What warnings do you find here? (Look back at 1:20–21 as well.)

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2. Why are false teachers dangerous (1:20–2:3)?

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3. Study verses 4–9. What did Peter want his readers to learn from these Old Testament events?

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4. How can knowledge of these Old Testament events help you endure environments around you that oppose true teachings about God?

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## **PILGRIMS, JUST PASSING THROUGH A Study of 1&2 PETER and JUDE**

5. What characteristics should alert us that we are encountering a false teacher (vv. 10–19)?

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6. Why might some people be attracted to teachers with these characteristics?

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7. Verse 19 says that false teachers may promise freedom. What kinds of freedom might a new or weak Christian find enticing?

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8. How might these “freedoms” become another form of slavery?

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9. Compare Christ’s work in 2 Peter 1:1–4 with the freedom and slavery of verse 19. How is the gift Christ offers different from the offering of a false teacher?

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10. Why might it be better if a false teacher had never known the truth (vv. 20–22)?

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11. How can you protect yourself from the influence of false teachers?

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12. What cautions can you institute to keep from becoming a false teacher yourself?

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*Pray for someone you know who is leaning toward a faith that is less than Christian.*

### **Now or Later**

In the year 325 some three hundred Christian bishops gathered from the far reaches of the then-known world and met at a town named Nicea in what is now northwest Turkey. Some of these Christians still bore wounds of persecution for their faith. Their purpose was to create a clear, concise statement of the Christian faith. After several months of careful study of Scripture they

## **PILGRIMS, JUST PASSING THROUGH A Study of 1&2 PETER and JUDE**

created the Nicene Creed, a basic statement still held as foundational Christian truth by Protestants and Catholics alike. Most heresies, when placed beside the Nicene Creed, reveal themselves to be less than Christian.

In the days ahead, spend time meditating on each line of this document, letting its full meaning sink into your soul. In prayer, praise God for himself as he is revealed in the faith of these ancient Christians.

*We believe in God, the Father Almighty,  
Maker of heaven and earth,  
of all things visible and invisible.*

*And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God,  
begotten of his Father before all worlds,  
God of God, Light of Light,  
very God of very God,  
begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father;  
by whom all things were made;  
who for us and for our salvation  
came down from heaven,  
and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary,  
and was made man;  
and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered and was buried;  
and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures,  
and ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father;  
and he shall come again, with glory, to judge both the living and the dead;  
whose kingdom shall have no end.*

*And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son;  
who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified;  
who spoke by the prophets;  
and we believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church;  
we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins;  
and we look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.*

—Council of Nicea, 325

# SESSION 11

## The Fire Next Time

### *2 Peter 3*

This world will end sometime, somehow, as Scripture has promised. At times that promise seems like a threat, a cruel interruption to a life full of hope not yet fulfilled. But at other times, when troubles loom and solutions defy our best efforts, that promise of an end feels like welcome relief.

**LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION.** If you were to paint a painting (or compose a piece of music) titled “The End of the World,” what would you put in it?

**PERSONAL REFLECTION.** When are you most likely to wish the world would end? Why? Take these feelings and circumstances to God in prayer, asking his relief. Ask for healing hope, not only for the world to come but also for the life that he gives you in this world.

The final chapter of Peter’s final letter speaks of an end, but an end with hope. *Read 2 Peter 3.*

1. If you were one of the early readers of this letter, what ideas in this chapter would cause you to pay attention?

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2. Verse 4 says that scoffers will ask, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised?” Read two of those promises in John 14:1–3 and Acts 1:6–11. If you were living thirty or forty years after Christ’s death and resurrection, what questions would you be asking about his return?

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3. What questions do you ask now?

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4. What mistakes will the last-day scoffers make (vv. 4–11)?

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5. What reasons does Peter offer for a delay in Christ’s return?

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# PILGRIMS, JUST PASSING THROUGH A Study of 1&2 PETER and JUDE

6. What words and phrases throughout this passage help describe the day of the Lord?

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7. Compare and contrast the use of fire and water in this passage. What is the significance of each?

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8. Notice the question of verse 11, “What kind of people ought you to be?” What answers can you find throughout the remainder of the chapter?

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9. Why might living this way prepare you for the kind of day described here?

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10. Over and over in this passage, we see words of destruction. In view of this, why do you think Peter says three times that we are to “look forward to” this day and even speed its coming?

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11. If the day of the Lord were to come in your lifetime, what would you like to accomplish first?

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In what condition would you like God to find your work?

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your relationships?

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your status with him?

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## **PILGRIMS, JUST PASSING THROUGH A Study of 1&2 PETER and JUDE**

*Pray thanking God that he is in charge of all things, that nothing (even the end of the world) is beyond his control. Invite God to prepare you for meeting him—however and whenever that occurs.*

### **Now or Later**

Read Revelation 22, the last chapter of the New Testament. Picture yourself in this scene, and thank God for what you find there.

The last prayer of the New Testament invites Jesus' return with the words, "Come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20). If you are able to do so honestly, pray this prayer as your own.

## SESSION 12

### The Twisted Fate of Twisted Faith

#### *Jude*

In November 1978, in a jungle clearing of Guyana, more than nine hundred people committed suicide by drinking cyanide-treated punch. Those too young to act on their own were given the punch by their parents. The Jonestown massacre sends a shudder through all Christians—and well it should—because Jim Jones, who prescribed this “White Night” of death, at one time claimed to be one of our own.

**LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION.** How do you think people get tricked into perverted versions of the Christian faith?

**PERSONAL REFLECTION.** What do you value about the Christian faith? Thank God for the place he has given you within this body of authentic believers.

Jude’s book is similar to 2 Peter 2. It warns us of false teachings and false faiths. *Read the book of Jude.*

1. What descriptions do you see here of people who hold a false kind of religion?

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2. What do the first two verses tell you about the writer of this letter and the people he wrote to?

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3. What can you know of the circumstances of the people receiving this letter and of Jude’s purpose in writing to them (vv. 3–4)?

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4. Find as many words and phrases as you can in this letter that describe those “certain men” who have “secretly slipped in among you.”

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5. What harm could people like these do within a body of believers?

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## **PILGRIMS, JUST PASSING THROUGH A Study of 1&2 PETER and JUDE**

**6.** Why might it be hard to resist their influence?

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**7.** Notice that one of the problems of these false teachers was that they denied “Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord” (v. 4). Study each word of that name for Jesus. How can the beliefs behind each of those words keep a Christian from straying into theological error?

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**8.** Note eight references to characters of Jewish history and literature in verses 5–11. What appears to be Jude’s purpose in pointing out these characters and events?

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**9.** Jude uses a series of six metaphors in verses 12–13. How does each illustrate the danger of teachers who have perverted the gospel?

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**10.** In the face of this problem, Jude gives his readers two sets of instructions: “remember” (v. 17) and “build yourselves up” (v. 20). Notice the specific instructions under each of these. How would remembering in the way Jude describes help believers keep the essential ingredients of the Christian faith?

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How would building ourselves up in the ways Jude outlines (vv. 20–23) help us keep on living in a way that is true to our faith?

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**11.** The doxology of verses 24–25 frequently closes Christian services of worship. Notice its description of God’s power and his character. How might a group of Christians troubled by infiltrated false teachings of life and doctrine take courage from these words?

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**12.** What errors in faith and life do you see as subtle dangers to today’s Christians?

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## PILGRIMS, JUST PASSING THROUGH A Study of 1&2 PETER and JUDE

13. How can you protect yourself, and other believers whose lives you touch, from falling into these errors?

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*Pray, asking God's protection on your faith.*

### **Now or Later**

Pray or sing Jude's doxology of verses 24–25 as your own praise to God.

Pray or sing it again, enjoying its blessing of God's protection as if this doxology were being prayed over you.

Pray the content of this blessing for various people, inserting their names as you pray God's keeping power on them.

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