

# Witness' Stand

2 Peter 1:16-21 February 22, 2026

In the 40's and 50's, if you needed an expert, you might go to Fred Demara. His resume is unlike anything you've ever heard. As a teen, he became a Catholic monk. He served in the army *and* the navy. He was a deputy sheriff and assistant prison warden. He became a lawyer, but wanted to teach. He taught 4th grade, but repeatedly found his way to higher education. He became a cancer researcher and a celebrated psychologist and child care expert.<sup>1</sup> He published a well-received booklet titled, *How to Bring Up Your Child*.

He worked in Arkansas, Los Angeles, Kentucky, Maine, Chicago, Texas, and Milwaukee, among other places. In Eerie, PA, he served as Dean of School of Philosophy at Gannon College. In Washington, he founded the St. Martin's Student Psychological Center.<sup>2</sup> This guy had answers!

But one day the FBI finally found Fred. He hadn't been going by "Fred" for quite some time. He was living as Dr. Robert French, a "religion-oriented psychologist." He took that name after faking his suicide and deserting the navy.

It was all lies. He had been thrown out of his Catholic monastery at age 18. He used a friend's name in the army and went AWOL in 1942. He moved so often because he always on the run.

He served 18 months for desertion...*and then went right back to his old ways!* He assumed *another* identity in Maine, where he founded a college which is *still* a university today!

But we're not done. In Maine, Fred befriended a surgeon. He took his friend's documentation, assumed his identity, and joined the Canadian Navy. During the Korean war, he served as the only doctor on a destroyer. "As the wounded arrived, he ordered personnel to prep them for operation. Disappearing to his room, he would read quickly on how to perform the next procedure. Then he would return to the operating table." Is that what you want *your* surgeon to do?

"When desiring a new 'career,' Fred would obtain a few pertinent textbooks, memorize the required info, and then present himself with bogus credentials and supreme confidence." Above all, he wanted prestige and status.<sup>3</sup>

One of the major reasons Peter is writing this last letter to the Christian world is to warn us of phonies and liars who want to set themselves up as experts over you. Meanwhile, these false teachers were saying *Peter* was the liar and quack. They *claimed* to have real expertise - that their teachings would *free* people from the oppressive mentality and morality of the apostles. But these ideas did not *enlighten* those who bought into them - they *entrapped* them. These were

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ferdinand\\_Waldo\\_Demara](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ferdinand_Waldo_Demara)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ncronline.org/news/people/brother-doctor-soldier-lies>

<sup>3</sup> <https://theconversation.com/how-to-become-a-great-impostor-98798>

“destructive heresies” that wrecks lives. Like Fred Demara stealing his friends’ identities for his own glory, these false teachers were exploiting and polluting Christians out of greed and jealousy.

Peter writes to counteract their lies with the truth. He’s been using dramatic language to impress on our minds how important this message and his warnings are. By the end of our text today, he’s going to say that these truths he and the other apostles gave the Church are like a light in the dark - they will give us the illumination and clarity necessary for the life ahead.

But why should we trust *him*? And why should we trust the Bible? All around us, there are plenty of people who claim to have truth, who claim to know the secrets *you* need for happiness, who claim to have the enlightenment that will unlock life’s mysteries. Who is reliable and who is the imposter?

In our text, Peter defends the validity of his testimony, the apostolic authority to speak for God, and the reliability of Scripture.

**2 Peter 1:16 - <sup>16</sup> For we did not follow cleverly contrived myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; instead, we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.**

We read the Bible and can’t help but admire the apostles. But there were people in the first century who subverted these guys and what they taught.

In this case, they were saying that Peter and the other apostles, were making up fairytales when it came to God’s morality *and* God’s plan for the future. We’ll see in chapter 3 that one of their main claims was that Jesus was *not* going to return again.

It is Christ’s *second* coming that Peter is referring to in this verse.<sup>4</sup> The future, bodily second coming of Jesus Christ to rule and reign over a literal Kingdom was a bedrock and essential teaching for the apostles. Peter talks about it. Paul talks about it. John talks about it. Hebrews talks about it. James talks about it. Jude talks about it.<sup>5</sup>

Think about all the expertise Peter had on the *first* coming of Jesus. And, naturally, he instructed the Church in those things. But here, at the end of his life and ministry, he takes the time to remind us of the importance, the primacy, the motivating factor of the return of Jesus to earth.

You see, the Gospel is not only about what Jesus *has* done, but what He *is* doing, and what He *will* do. Peter explains that, when Christ comes, it will be in *power*. It is not a *secret* coming. The Kingdom is not just spiritual - it’s not just an allegory. Christ comes with absolute power. He will rule with a rod of iron. *Every* knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. He will restore creation. If you want to know more of what His Kingdom will be like, read Psalm 2. Read Ezekiel 40-48. Read Isaiah. Read Revelation 20-22. The day is coming. The Kingdom is coming. And

<sup>4</sup> Edwin Blum *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Volume 12: Hebrews Through Revelation*

<sup>5</sup> <https://rootedthinking.com/2024/08/06/50-references-to-the-second-coming/>

Peter said, "Listen - I am an *eyewitness of these things*." Remember: he, along with James and John, saw the Lord in His Kingdom glory - just a glimpse.

**2 Peter 1:17-18** - <sup>17</sup> **For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased!"** <sup>18</sup> **We ourselves heard this voice when it came from heaven while we were with him on the holy mountain.**

This refers to the Transfiguration, which we read about in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It was a momentary preview - a coming attraction - of Jesus in His glorified authority.

Peter explains that they saw Jesus in His glorification and they *heard* God the Father speak from heaven. If you're trying to determine which teacher is bonafide and which is not - if one person is telling you the resurrection has already happened and the "Millennial Kingdom" is just an old wives tale, and the *other* person says, "I'm an eyewitness. I'm an earwitness," which is more reliable?

Our justice system relies on witnesses. When you bring a case to court, the court calls witnesses to testify about what they've seen and heard - to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

Sometimes people who don't want to believe in Jesus will say, "I have to see it for myself." But that would be like a judge saying, "Well, I can't decide the case because *I* wasn't there to see it." But here's all the evidence. Here are the witnesses!

Now, another key revelation of the transfiguration is that Christ's Kingdom *is* literal and bodily. Jesus was *truly* transfigured. It's not just a state of mind. It's not just a philosophical ideal. Moses and Elijah were there, speaking with Him. It was the prelude to His real, future arrival.

**2 Peter 1:19** - <sup>19</sup> **We also have the prophetic word strongly confirmed, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.**

On top of being an eyewitness, Peter says here's *another* reason to believe the apostles' teaching, rather than the Judaizers or the Gnostics or the Nicolaitans or any of the other groups seeking to dominate the Church: The apostles' teaching lined up with the Bible, which is absolutely reliable.

Specifically, Peter references Old Testament prophecy. But he's not only referring to the books after Song of Solomon. There is prophecy - even prophecy about the future Kingdom - all over the Old Testament. In Genesis, in Numbers, in Psalms, in Deuteronomy, in Job, in Ecclesiastes.

And Peter points out that Old Testament prophecy has been "strongly confirmed." It is not only proved to be *true*, but to be *literal*.

There are some today, even in the Church, who say that Bible prophecy isn't literal. What they mean is the prophecies about the future from *our* spot on the timeline aren't literal. They're allegorical. They're figurative.

But, were the prophecies about the Messiah's *first* coming literal? That He would be born of a virgin? That He would be born in Bethlehem? That He would be a Nazarene? That He would be betrayed and suffer and die?

There are more than 300 specific prophecies about the Messiah that Jesus *literally* fulfilled.<sup>6</sup> It's *only* possible if He really is God and the Bible really is true. But now, some say, "The prophecies of the Kingdom aren't literal." Peter says, these things are *strongly confirmed!* More than that, he tells us how important it is to be students of Bible prophecy. "You will do well to pay attention to it."

The Word of God is a lamp shining in a dark place. Peter is specifically referring to Old Testament prophecy here, but *all* of Scripture is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.<sup>7</sup> It illuminates our lives so we can see where to go - how to step - what's ahead of us.

Life on this side of eternity is shrouded in darkness.<sup>8</sup> That is a regular description of our world in the New Testament.<sup>9</sup> Peter uses a term here that refers to the squalor and gloom of a dungeon.<sup>10</sup> It's a fallen world in which good is called evil and evil is called good and there is separation between God and man. And so, the Lord has given us the 66 books of the Bible, so that we can know Him, know His ways, know His will, see His doings in the past, the present, *and* the future.

The Bible is not only about *ethic*, but also *prophetic*. And knowing the future *should* have a great impact on how we behave in the present. In chapter 3, Peter's going to say, "Since God has shared the future with you, it is clear what sort of people we should be." Paul says something similar in Romans 13:

**Romans 13:12 - <sup>12</sup> The night is nearly over, and the day is near; so let us discard the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.**

When the night is over and the day dawns - meaning *when* Christ returns and sets up His Kingdom, well then everything in us and around us will be totally illuminated by the Morning Star - Who is Christ Jesus. He is the Light Bringer. That's what the term "morning star" literally means.<sup>11</sup> Jesus Christ is the light at the end of the tunnel. By His word, we can see. By God's word, we can navigate.

In the here and now, there will be some things we'll be left in the dark about. Why did God allow *that* situation? Why didn't God intervene in *this* way? One day, all will be lit up. That is the day when

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<sup>6</sup> Ray Konig *301 Prophecies Fulfilled By Jesus*

<sup>7</sup> Psalm 119:105

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 9:2

<sup>9</sup> J.N.D. Kelly *The Epistles Of Peter And Of Jude*

<sup>10</sup> Dick Lucas & Christopher Green *The Message Of 2 Peter & Jude*

<sup>11</sup> Douglas Moo *The NIV Application Commentary: 2 Peter, Jude*

Christ returns to rule and reign. Meanwhile, if you find yourself in a dark tunnel, if you are walking through the valley of the shadow of death, head toward the Light. You can be sure the Lord is good and can be trusted.

**2 Peter 1:20-21 - <sup>20</sup> Above all, you know this: No prophecy of Scripture comes from the prophet's own interpretation, <sup>21</sup> because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.**

Scholars divide over Peter's main idea. He could be saying that the Old Testament prophets did not come up with their writings on their own. Their messages came from God. That is absolutely true.

But the phrasing can also mean that we, as readers, do not have the luxury of just coming up with our own interpretation on the Biblical text.<sup>12</sup>

Let's take that second idea first. As we read the Bible, whether it's a prophetic section or any other passage, we cannot just decide what it means by our own whims. This is where the cults come from. The Bible doesn't mean what you *want* it to mean. If you've ever been in a Bible discussion group and the leader says, "Let's all go around and say what this verse means to us," really, that's not a great mentality. "To me this means A." "Well, to *me* this means Q!" The question is never, "What does this text mean to *me*," the question is, "What does this text *mean*?"

The false teachers of Peter's time were taking the Scriptures and twisting them to fit their own agendas and desires. But our job is not to superimpose our own ideas or agendas on God's Word, but to *submit* ourselves to what God has revealed.

But now turning to that first way of understanding these verses: The Old Testament writers did not just come up with stories and ideas and messages of their own. God's word is *inspired*. And to help us understand that miracle, Peter says the writers were "carried along." It's a term that can refer to a boat with her sails full, driven by the wind.<sup>13</sup>

The Holy Spirit operated in power through the authors who cooperated with God to deliver His word, while still retaining their own style, vocabulary, and ability. They weren't in a trance as God wrote the words through their hands. But what they wrote was absolutely originated from God.

The Bible is plenary, verbally, fully inspired without error in the original writings and is the infallible rule of our faith and practice as Christians. It is the most reliable written work of all history. It has been proven accurate again and again and again in century after century, case after case, life after life. If you are here and you struggle to believe that the Bible is the word of God Himself, you don't have to take my word for it. Go read *The Case For Christ*. Go read *Evidence That Demands A Verdict*. Read *A Biblical Case For Total Inerrancy*, or *Can I Trust The Bible*?

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<sup>12</sup> Kelly

<sup>13</sup> Moo

God has spoken so that we might know Him. So that we might know the truth and the truth would set us free. Peter and the other apostles laid down their lives for this truth. And they shared this truth with us so that we could be liberated and illuminated, not so they could lord over anyone.

It's a shame that people were accusing Peter of being like Fred Demara. Peter was the real deal. He wrote this defense *not* to make us think more highly of *him*, but so that we wouldn't be shipwrecked by the lies trying to break their way into our hearts. Lies that lead not to enlightenment, but deeper into the dark.

As we close, one moment of application for we who are Christians here this morning. Peter was able to be *powerfully* used to spread the truth - to bring light to those who needed it - because he had a reliable personal witness. He said to this audience, "*I saw God work. I heard Him. I walked with Him.*"

Peter stepped into eternity 2,000 years ago. Now *YOU* are the witness called to the stand. *You* get to be the one to proclaim to those in the dark that you have *seen* the light. That *you* have heard from God and have seen Him work in *your* midst. Now *we* get to have the sails of our lives filled by the Holy Spirit.

Live a life that is worthy of the witness stand. Join with God in the testimony-building He wants to do in and through you. You don't have to steal someone else's identity. He's *made* you to shine the light of the truth. Let your light shine by moving closer to the Light, Himself, and illuminating your heart, your mind, your experience with the brilliance of His word.