

The Authority by Which We Live

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Preacher: Edward Lobb

[0 : 00] Well, friends, we come now to our Bible reading, so let's turn to the second letter of the Apostle Peter, and you'll find this on page 1019.

Actually, 1018. I hadn't got my glasses on, but now I can see the words. I'm in the figures. So, 1018, 2 Peter, chapter 1. And the passage that we'll be studying a little bit later this evening runs from verse 12 to verse 21, but I'll read the whole of the first chapter again so that we can get the full context and try to follow the Apostle's line of thought.

So, 2 Peter, chapter 1, beginning at the first verse. Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

[1 : 57] For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they will keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure.

For if you practice these qualities, you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Therefore, I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me.

And I will make every effort so that after my departure, you may be able at any time to recall these things. 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.

[3 : 17] For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was born to him by the majestic glory, this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased, we ourselves heard this very voice born from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.

And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, 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.

Knowing this, first of all, that no prophecy of scripture comes from someone's own interpretation, 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. This is the word of the Lord. May it be a blessing to us.

Well, let's turn again in our Bibles to the second letter of Peter, chapter 1, page 1018 in our big Bibles.

[4 : 40] And my title for this evening is, The Authority by Which We Live. It's revealing to ask people by what kind of authority they live their lives, by what kind of authority they make their decisions.

Most people, after all, do live by some kind of authoritative principle, unless their lives have been fundamentally undermined by substance abuse or perhaps by severe psychotic illness.

But just think of your friends and your neighbors and colleagues. What authority guides their steps? To whom do they turn for light or for help? There are some people who seem to go right the way through life, trusting the values and sayings of their parents or perhaps their grandparents.

My granny, bless her, used to say, always do people a good turn and the sun will shine upon you, for example. Or how about this?

My dad, he used to say, hit them hard and they'll not fight back. I've always run my business like that. Somebody else might put up onto a pedestal some famous person as their guru.

[5 : 55] Bob Dylan, for example. Even Shakespeare. I always return to the poems and plays of the old bard of Stratford-on-Avon. Nobody understood human nature in all its colors quite as well as Shakespeare.

Other people rely on some kind of an inner light, something in there. Listen to your heart, they say. Your heart will tell you what to do.

Nobody knows the right way forward quite as well as your own heart. Now, interestingly, that's not quite such a modern view. It has a bit of history. For example, Shakespeare has a character in Hamlet called Polonius.

Polonius is quite an old man. And early in the play, he's advising his young son as the son sets out to make his way in life. And after giving various pieces of advice, the older man says, This above all, to thine own self be true.

And it must follow as the night, the day, thou canst not then be false to any man. Be true to yourself. Now, is that good advice? What does Jesus say about the self?

[7 : 03] If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself. He teaches self-denial. The apostles consistently teach self-control, all of which suggests that the self is not a very good guide for life.

Listen to the words of Jeremiah the prophet. He says, The heart, which is much the same as the self, the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick. So to trust your inner self seems to be a perilous thing to do.

So what is your authority? Let me ask you. What is your authority? When you reach a crossroads in life, where do you turn to for wisdom and guidance? Now, it's this question which underlies much that Peter is saying in his second letter.

He is showing his readers the only true and trustworthy authority by which the Christian life can be safely lived. And that is the authority of the apostles of the New Testament and the prophets of the Old Testament.

In other words, the whole Bible, as we would say it. Now, if you're a Christian and somebody asks you to name the authority by which you live, you will probably say the Bible.

[8 : 13] But that's a pretty blunt and brief answer. It's a bit like having somebody ask you, what's that machine? And you say, it's a car. But that says nothing about oil and batteries and carburettors and dipsticks and tire pressures and so on.

But when you lift the bonnet and you look inside, you begin to see the details that make up a car. And what Peter does for us here in the second half of chapter one is to lift the bonnet on the on the Bible, if you like, and to show us some of the details as to why the Bible is the authority for the Lord's people.

And he does this at this point in his letter because he's wanting to strengthen his Christian readers against false teaching. They need to know where to turn for the true teaching.

The big purpose of this letter is to expose false teaching and false teachers and to enable the Christians to grow and to keep growing, to grow strong in their faith and their understanding and their knowledge.

Peter is therefore contrasting the true teaching of the apostles and prophets in chapter one with the false teaching of charlatans and quacks in chapter two. Just look at how chapter two begins.

[9 : 25] But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you who will secretly bring in destructive heresies. So if Christian readers are to be strong enough and well grown enough to recognize and reject the false teaching, they need to be able to say more than more than my authority is the Bible.

They need Peter's teaching on why the Bible carries this authority. The details that Peter goes into here in verses 12 to 21 will give us a more sure grasp on why the Bible is the rightful authority by

which we can live a persevering and happy Christian life.

So we'll take this in three sections. First, from verses 12 to 15, we have the necessary repetitions of the teaching apostle.

The necessary repetitions. There's something about verse 12 which is almost rude. But we do sometimes need a little bit of rude treatment to wake us up occasionally. What he's saying there in verse 12 is, You know the truth.

You're established in the truth. But I don't trust your little heads to keep a firm hold on the truth. So I'm going to keep on reminding you of these things. Your heads are like sieves. Stuff goes in, but it quickly falls out again.

[10:44] So I intend always to remind you of these things. Isn't that pastorally wise? I must confess that I frequently forget aspects of Christian truth.

There are a few things that go in there and seem to stay there. But other things go in for a short time and then fall out through my mental sieve, which has pretty big holes in it. And those things only get back into my head again when I read a Bible passage again or hear a sermon.

And then I say to myself, of course, you silly sieve head. Get that truth back in there and glue it in. But very often it's gone again a few months later. In fact, there are some Bible truths which I have learned 10 times over, but I've forgotten them 10 times over.

And I imagine that unless you have the brains of an Einstein, you're much the same as me. Now, it may be that that famous verse, Deuteronomy chapter 8, verse 3, which Willie was expounding here two or three weeks ago, it may help us to understand our forgetfulness and why we have this constant need to be reminded.

Deuteronomy 8, 3 tells us that man does not live by bread alone. That means by food alone. Now, how do we live by bread or by food, physical food?

[12:02] The answer is only by taking it in frequently. One single meal won't sustain us for 70 years, will it? You've got to eat three times a day, more or less, in order to stay healthy.

That's how you live by bread physically, by repeated intake. And in the same way, we live spiritually only by repeated intake of the word of God.

That's why we need, in Peter's phrase, to be always reminded. He says the thing again in verse 13. I think it right, as long as I'm in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder.

And again in verse 15, at the very end of the verse, he says, I want you to be able at any time to recall these things. In other words, to remember them. So let's admit without embarrassment that our brains are a bit like sieves.

We need to have frequent reminders. And that's exactly what happens to us as we gather together as Christians at our Sunday services and our midweek meetings and Bible study groups.

[13:07] How often do we learn something which is really new from a Sunday sermon? I would say not very often. There are moments occasionally when something presents itself to us which we've never seen before.

But that might only happen a few times per year. 98% of what we hear in sermons is truth that we've heard before. Now, it's often presented to us in a fresh way.

And therefore, it's really interesting to listen to it. But the Bible reworks the same great themes over and over again, such as salvation and judgment, heaven and hell, sin and holiness, the glory and power of God, the person of Jesus and his work, the person of the Holy Spirit and his work, the authority and delightfulness of the Bible.

That's this evening's subject. And many other familiar themes. But we need to be constantly reminded of them because we are so forgetful. It's not as though you learn the message of the whole Bible just once in one great input.

Let's say in 1980. In it goes. And it lasts you right the way through until you die in 2050. It's not like that, is it? We need continual reminders just as we need our breakfast, our lunch and our tea every day.

[14:24] It's the constant reminders that keep our faith fresh and strong and growing and happy and active. But let's notice who it is that does the reminding.

It's not just some ordinary pastor or preacher. It's the apostle here, the apostle Peter. And you'll see that he writes here with a sense of great authority, a kind of authority that nobody should dare question.

Look at his tone here in verse 12. Therefore, I intend always to remind you of these things because I'm an apostle. And Christ has appointed us apostles as the teachers of the churches.

Now, he's going to tell us more about his apostolic authority in the next paragraph. But we need to notice it whenever we are reading a New Testament letter. The New Testament's understanding of who the apostle is, what the role of the apostle is, is that he not only speaks for the Lord Jesus, his words are the words of the Lord Jesus.

Just look across to chapter 3, verses 1 and 2. Chapter 3, verses 1 and 2. This is now the second letter that I'm writing to you, beloved. In both of them, I'm stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder.

[15 : 38] There he goes again about the reminder. Now, verse 2, that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles.

Isn't that striking? Here is the Lord and Savior Jesus issuing his commands to the churches through the apostles. So, although the word apostle literally means somebody who is sent out, the apostles of Jesus are more than his emissaries or ambassadors.

They are his mouthpiece. Their words are his words. Now, this is why it's misleading of some Bible publishers to print the words of Jesus in the four Gospels in red.

Have you ever seen those red-letter Bibles? Perhaps you've got one. But in those Bibles, the words of Jesus are printed in red. Everybody else's words are printed in black. The implication being that the words of Jesus, they are 100% pure scripture, pure word of God.

Whereas the words of Peter and Paul and John are secondary and derivative and therefore a little less authoritative. Now, if you regard the words of Peter and Paul and the other apostles as secondary scripture, you will feel free to sit light to them.

[16 : 56] You'll downplay the parts of them that you don't like or that you might find hard to accept, such as Paul's teaching on sexual morality or what Paul has to say on the roles of men and women. I once heard a young preacher say in a study group, but these are only the words of Paul.

Only. Look again at verse 2 in our chapter 3. The Lord and Savior issues his commandment through the apostles. Look further down the page to chapter 3, verses 15 and 16, where Peter gladly acknowledges that the letters of Paul are scripture.

Have a look at chapter 3, verse 15. Count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you, according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters.

There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction as they do the other scriptures.

Do you see that? As they do the other scriptures. Isn't that telling? Here we are very early in about 60 AD, and yet in a most natural and unselfconscious way, Peter speaks of Paul's letters as scripture, meaning the very word of God.

[18 : 13] So friends, let's ditch this red letter thinking. Peter speaks with all the authority of Jesus. And let's notice also how determined he is that his readers should continue to benefit from his teaching, even after his death.

Verse 13, chapter 1, verse 13. He says, As long as I'm still alive in this body, I am going to keep stirring you up by way of reminder. I'm not going to let you congeal like a bowl of porridge.

My responsibility is to stir you, to keep at you like a gadfly, because you'll go to sleep if you're given half a chance. But I know that I'm going to die before long.

So, verse 15, I'm going to make every effort so that after my departure, you may be able at any time to recall these things.

Now, how is he going to do that? How is he going to make sure that they can continue to benefit from his teaching after his death? Well, certainly by writing this letter and his first letter and getting these letters distributed far and wide and arranging for them to be copied and circulated.

[19 : 17] Peter may also be thinking here of Mark's gospel, because the scholars all tell us on good grounds that Mark was a kind of secretary to Peter, and therefore Mark's gospel is really the personal eyewitness testimony of Peter to the facts about Jesus' life and work.

So our verses 13 to 15 here show that Peter regarded the apostles as having an ongoing authority, not just confined to their own lifetime, but going on into the future.

Which is why here we are, sitting here nearly 2,000 years later, still being taught by Peter. Just think of it. All over the world today, at this very moment, millions of Christian congregations are absorbing the teaching of Peter and Paul and John.

millions of Christians at this moment are acknowledging the authority of these men who were commissioned by Jesus to teach the gospel and to press home its implications in perpetuity, right until the Lord returns.

So there's the first thing, the necessary repetitions of the teaching apostle. We need to keep listening to our apostles. In three days' time, it will be Wednesday.

[20 : 32] And a friend might meet you and say to you, were you in church on Sunday evening? And you say, yes. Was the sermon on 2 Peter? Yes, it was. What did you learn from the Bible that evening?

Oh, now you're putting me on the spot. Oh, three days. See, Peter knows the limitations of the human mind. That's why we need to be often reminded of these things, even though we know them already, as verse 12 says.

Well, now, secondly, from verses 16 to 18, we have the personal testimony of the eyewitness apostle. You'll see Peter says at the end of verse 16, we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. And as you read over verses 16 to 18 again, you'll see that Peter is obviously writing here about the transfiguration of Jesus. When Peter and James and John, just the three of them, went up a high mountain with Jesus and they saw him transformed.

His clothes, you remember, became dazzlingly white and his appearance became glorious. Now, the question is, why does this section, this little section on the transfiguration of Jesus, follow the section that we've just been looking at?

[21 : 49] It seems quite a jump, doesn't it? Peter is talking about the need to keep on reminding his readers about the basics of the Christian life. And now suddenly, he's reminiscing about the transfiguration.

So what is his line of thinking? Let's follow him from verse 12 right through to the start of chapter 2. And I think we'll see that his thinking here is not random at all, but carefully and purposefully developed.

His main point is, the point he's working up to making, is don't listen to false teachers who are threatening to lead you astray. Listen to me and the other apostles because we teach the truth and have genuine authority.

So Peter is training his readers to listen to the right teachers. So I think the thread of his thinking runs like this. Verses 12 to 15. I'm going to die before long, but before my death, I will keep on reminding you of the truth.

And after my death, I will make sure that you keep listening to me. And why can I command attention like this? Because of the authority given to me by Jesus.

[22 : 55] So let me tell you about that authority. I was one of the three apostles who were with him on the Mount of Transfiguration. I saw his heavenly glory with my own eyes.

It was he who gave me the privilege of seeing him as he really is, seeing his true glory. So, verse 16. When I've been teaching you in the past about his power and his coming, meaning his second coming, I've been doing so because I know what I'm talking about.

On the Mount of Transfiguration, I had a glimpse of his true power and glory. It was a foretaste of what he's going to look like when he returns. The false teachers, and Peter is going to go and develop this further in chapter 3, the false teachers deny that Jesus will return.

And they scoff at the very idea of his second coming. But I know the truth about it. I was there on the mountain for the foretaste of it. But, verse 19, don't just rely on me and my eyewitness experience.

There is something yet more sure as a basis for your confidence. And that is the Old Testament, the words of the prophets, which have their origin not in the inventiveness of the minds of the prophets, but in the mind of God himself.

[24 : 14] Because it's the Holy Spirit who gave the Old Testament prophets their words. So, chapter 2, verse 1, when these self-styled, self-appointed prophets come along, denying the great truths about Jesus, especially denying that he's going to return, don't believe them.

Recognize them for what they are. There were false prophets back then in the Old Testament times, and there are false teachers around today. So, don't pay any attention to them. Do you see

how the thing develops, where he's going?

His whole purpose in this section of the letter is to give his readers a solid confidence in the two types of teacher that they can trust, the apostles of the New Testament and the prophets of the Old Testament.

Paul famously writes in 2 Timothy, chapter 3, all scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, rebuke, correction, and training in righteousness.

And this passage in 2 Peter is making exactly the same point, but is giving us more detail. We're seeing some of the hinterland of it as to why the Old Testament and the New Testament carry the full weight of God's authority.

[25 : 27] So, let's look at these details here in verses 16 to 18, the personal testimony of the eyewitness apostle. Peter emphasizes the eyewitness element here in verse 16, and in doing so, he is completely in line with the whole of the New Testament, because eyewitness testimony is the thing that gives the four Gospels their solid reliability.

For example, let me quote to you, you'll know this, but the opening words of Luke's Gospel. Think of the eyewitnesses here. Luke says, in as much as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, Jesus' life and death and so on, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, etc.

So, the authoritative source of truth about Jesus is the eyewitness. It's exactly the same in John's Gospel. The theme that underlies the whole of John's Gospel is the testimony of eyewitnesses to the truth about Jesus.

At the very climax of the Gospel, John's Gospel, in chapter 20, Jesus says to Thomas, have you believed because you have seen me? The answer is yes.

That is precisely why Thomas begins to believe at that point. It was because he saw with his eyes. Think of Paul. Paul was not one of the twelve apostles, but he understood that the thing which qualified him and authorized him to be an apostle was the fact that he had seen the risen Jesus with his own eyes on the road to Damascus in that blinding vision.

[27 : 10] He saw the risen Christ and it was that true and undeniable vision that sustained him through 30 years of his labors and sufferings. So back to 2 Peter chapter 1.

In verse 16, Peter is obviously refuting a false accusation that was thrown at him and his fellow apostles. And here's the accusation.

Look at verse 16 here. The accusation is these apostles, they made it all up. It's fairy stories. It's obviously cleverly devised myths. Pull the other one, Peter.

It's got bells on. Ding dong, ding dong. No, says Peter. I deny what you say absolutely because I was there on that amazing day and James and John were with me.

Together we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. His majesty, the king in his glory. In other words, we saw him then as we had never seen him before. Before that day, his appearance was just like that of any other ordinary young Jew.

[28 : 13] Dark hair, dark eyes and beard and so on. None of your sentimental English parish church stained glass window Jesuses with golden hair and blue eyes. Not like that at all. He just looked like one of us.

An unexceptional young Jew. But on the mountain there, we saw his majesty, his glory. His clothes were dazzling. We could hardly look at them. And he was talking with Moses and Elijah.

And we realized afterwards that Moses represents the law and Elijah the prophets. And Jesus fulfills both. Both of them point to him. But, verse 17 now, it wasn't just what we saw.

It was what we heard. The voice of God the Father speaking to Jesus from heaven and identifying him, lest we should be in any doubt as to who he was.

The voice said, this is my beloved son. Quoting from Psalm 2. With whom I am well pleased. Quoting from Isaiah 42. Because Jesus fulfills not only the law and the prophets, but the Psalms too.

[29 : 15] And who heard the voice of God? Well, Jesus did. Verse 17. The voice was born to him. But also, says Peter, we did. Indeed, we ourselves heard this very voice born from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.

So Peter is claiming here the authority of both the eyewitness, in verse 17, and the ear witness, if there is such a word, in verse 18. We saw the majesty of Christ.

We heard the voice of the Father explaining the identity of Jesus to us. And we were there. We were with him. So don't talk to me about cleverly devised myths, you ignoramus.

That's what he's saying. And when you first read verse 16, just run your eye over 16 again, it's not immediately obvious whether Peter is talking about Jesus' first coming in the past or his second coming in the future.

But it's the second coming he's talking about. Peter is referring here back to the preaching of himself and the other apostles. When we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[30 : 23] Christ. And what is, the way his logic runs is like this. We have preached to you, my readers, in the past about the glorious future return of Christ. We've talked to you about that, about his coming in power.

And when silly ignoramuses criticize this teaching and scoff at it, they are quite unaware of what James and John and I saw and heard on the mountain. What we saw was a revelation of Christ in his glory.

Not a foretaste of his resurrection primarily, but a foretaste of his return. A foretaste of his kingly power. We saw him in his majesty as we shall see him again when he comes in glory.

Now that's what Peter is saying. You see, nobody in the first century was denying Christ's first coming. That wasn't the pointed issue. Everybody knew that Jesus of Nazareth had been a real man and a remarkable leader.

Nobody was suggesting that the stories of Jesus' earthly life were cleverly devised myths. It was when the apostles preached his return. That's when the cynics started to scoff.

[31 : 30] And Peter is refuting their denial of the second coming by saying, we have had a foretaste of it and we know what we're talking about because we were there. We were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

It's the truth of the second coming which is being denied by the false teachers. And Peter is going to develop in chapter 3 his demolition of the scoffers who say that Christ is not going to come back to judge the world.

So what lies behind the authority of the Bible? Well, we've seen in verses 16 to 18 the personal eyewitness testimony of Peter. Now thirdly, verses 19 to 21.

He speaks of the divine origin of the Old Testament, of the words of the prophets. Look how he begins verse 19. And we have something more sure.

More sure. How could there be anything more sure than Peter's eyewitness testimony? But he says there is something more sure and it's the prophetic word.

[32 : 33] And that phrase prophetic word doesn't just refer to the foretelling elements of the Old Testament, the passages that foretell the future. What Peter means by that is the whole of the Old Testament, the words of Moses and all the other Old Testament authors.

So what is Peter's message to us about the Old Testament? He says simply in verse 19, you will do well to pay attention to it. Now I want to return to that verse 19 in a moment once we've grasped what Peter is saying in verses 20 and 21.

because verses 20 and 21 give us the reason why we shall do well to pay attention to the Old Testament. And those two verses, 20 and 21, tell us that its origin is divine and not human.

Look at verse 21. Knowing this, first of all, that no prophecy of scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. Peter is talking there.

It's quite difficult to understand at first sight, but Peter is talking there not about the way that we read the Bible. He's talking about the way its authors wrote it. That phrase, someone's own interpretation, is not about you or me sitting down reading a Bible passage and trying to understand it.

[33 : 53] It's about how Moses or Jeremiah or Isaiah set down the words in their prophecies. What Peter is saying is, picture one of the prophets, picture Isaiah, for example, with his parchment open in front of him and his pen in his hand and he begins to write words down.

What is he doing? What is the Old Testament prophet doing as he writes or dictates his words? Is he saying to himself, I'm a man of skill and experience. I understand the times.

I'm personally acquainted with the king and the government and I'm a skillful interpreter of history and current affairs. So I shall give to the nation the benefit of my interpretation of events.

And I'll add a few words of advice as to how we should go forward as a nation from here. And that's how a modern political commentator works or a modern politician. He studies history, he studies current affairs and he offers his diagnosis of current problems and suggests remedies. And of course his thinking and suggestions will be colored and shaped in large part by his political convictions. So he may present a Tory view or a socialist view or a nationalist view or a Marxist view.

[35 : 06] In Peter's phrase he will offer his own interpretation of things. Now what Peter is saying is that the authors of the Old Testament did not operate on that basis.

Not at all. On the contrary. 4 verse 21 no prophecy of scripture was ever produced on that basis which expresses nothing more than the will of man.

The Old Testament was written down by men who were speaking from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. Look at that phrase in the middle of verse 21 because it sums up memorably for us the dual origin of the Bible.

Men spoke from God. The Bible was produced through a human channel but its origin is entirely divine and that's why we can trust it and that's why we must trust it.

Although it was written down by men it is perfect and flawless and without error because its origin is God. And how did its human authors write it down?

[36 : 13] Well says Peter they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. And the verb used there is a word that describes how a strong wind will fill the sails of a ship and drive it forward through the waves of the sea to carry it forward.

Now this doesn't mean of course that the minds of the prophets were absent as though they were just dictating machines. Nothing going on in my mind I'm just writing something down not at all.

Their minds were not absent at all. Their minds are obviously strongly engaged and their individual characters and personalities are completely preserved and yet they were speaking from God.

That's the origin of their words. So if you're ever doing a Bible study on the Bible's understanding of the Bible in other words the doctrine of Scripture these last two verses in 2 Peter chapter 1 are very important verses.

But Peter's concern here is not simply that his readers should have a correct understanding of the doctrine of Scripture of what Scripture is. This letter is not a theology lecture to a class of university students.

[37 : 21] this is a pastoral letter to people whose faith was being threatened by false teachers and he's going to give strong warnings in chapter 2 and in chapter 3 about these false teachers.

Peter is not simply concerned about the doctrine of his readers he's concerned about their lives and their happiness and perseverance as Christians. And this brings us back to verse 19.

And we have something more sure the prophetic word the Old Testament 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.

Pay attention to the Scriptures says Peter as to a lamp shining in a dark place. Just think of that phrase a lamp shining in a dark place.

Our English word dark doesn't do full justice to the word that Peter uses here. He really means gloomy or squalid the sort of word that might describe an underground dungeon of yesteryear a place full of filth and corruption and despairing human beings.

[38 : 32] And that dark place is a description of the world that we live in. Isn't the Bible realistic and truthful? There's something in human nature that wants to deny that our world is a dark place of that kind.

Let's be optimistic about things people say. Let's believe in progress. Let's believe that the human race is getting better and better. Look at science and technology and medicine.

They're leaping forward every year. So surely human nature is going to leap forward towards perfection soon. But if you believe that you are living in cloud cuckoo land aren't you?

Think of what happens every time the Americans elect a new president. It didn't quite so much happen a few months ago but it certainly has always happened in the past. The new president gets installed in the White House and people regard him as a kind of saviour don't they?

He's going to change everything. That's what Mr. Obama said. It's going to be change, change, change isn't it? And Mr. Obama tried but he found it was very difficult to put it mildly. Now Mr. Trump has just come in promising the earth, the skies, and the universe.

[39 : 41] But is he really going to wipe ISIS off the face of the earth? Is he really going to stop the strutting and threats of the young hothead who's in charge of North Korea?

That kind of optimism is extraordinarily naive isn't it? The world isn't like that. When you listen carefully to the daily news you realize that at least 90% of it is describing conflict at some level. Or bring the focus down out of the big world out there. Think of your own family if I can ask you to do that. Think of your own family. The present generation of your family and the generation of your parents and your grandparents.

Now there may be a good deal of happiness in your own family. I hope there has been. I hope there is. But isn't it true? Think back a generation or two or three. Isn't it true that every family has its own darkneses and some of them are very gloomy and sordid?

Think of the hatreds that develop between brothers and sisters or between parents and children. The battles over money or property the divorces the adultery the violence and drunkenness the horror of irretrievably broken relationships the suicides.

[40 : 54] Isn't there darkness in the history of every family? And tomorrow when you get back to your work or to school or college you will encounter darkness jealousy and strain and unkindness people misusing each other treating each other as despicable or dispensable.

The de-godding of God is the unmaning of man. Our very humanity becomes shrunk and shriveled unless unless we follow the teaching of our apostle Peter.

Look again at verse 19 it is so encouraging. The world is a dark and squalid place but a lamp is shining into the darkness. And what is that lamp?

It's the prophetic word the message from heaven the teaching of the Old Testament and of the apostles and Peter says there in verse 19 pay attention to it pay attention to the Bible don't let your life be governed by the gurus of this world or by the naive optimisms of politicians pay attention to the Bible it's the only lamp that shines in this gloomy world.

And where does our attending to the Bible lead to? Verse 19 tells us it leads to the dawning of the day by which Peter means the great day of the return of Jesus.

[42 : 13] As we study the Bible and pay real attention to it we shall become deeply convinced that the Lord Jesus who ascended into heaven will one day return from heaven to bring the whole world to his righteous judgment to separate the sheep from the goats and to give his people possession of the new heavens and the new earth where righteousness is at home.

And Peter tells us here not only that this great day will dawn but also that the morning star will rise not in the sky but in our hearts by which he means the inner joy of anticipating this new and glorious morning.

So friends let me again ask this question by what authority are you living your life? If you are ruled at this moment by King's self dethrone him he's not worth having there.

If your dreams are shaped by Bob Dylan or by Ed Sheeran show them the door. If you're hoping against hope that Mrs. May or Mr. Trump or Mrs. Sturgeon are going to sort the world out think again.

Put your trust in God because he has given us something wonderfully sure something rock solid and true. The prophetic word the Bible which is the one lamp the only lamp to guide our feet in this very dark world.

[43 : 36] And as Peter says here we will do well to pay attention to it. Well let's bow our heads and we'll pray. Dear God our Father how we thank you with all our hearts that you have had mercy upon us and have left to us left in our very hands this wonderful record of what you have said in the past and continue to say to us in the present and for the future.

Help us indeed to dethrone anything else that may be wanting to rule our lives especially self. And we pray that you will help us to turn to your words to love them because they come straight from your mouth and your heart and they tell us the truth about ourselves and about the world and above all about you and about our saviour the Lord Jesus.

So have mercy upon us dear Father and help us to love your words to live by them and to grow in our rejoicing. And we ask it all in Jesus name.

Amen.