

Scriptures we call the Old Testament. Peter is saying that the written Scriptures are even more authoritative than his personal experience of being with Jesus.

"Completely reliable" – Peter is saying that his first-hand experience of hearing God's audible voice, something hard to dismiss, gives evidence to what the prophets had said about the Messiah, and His coming as Lord of all, at the end time.

"Until the day dawns... the morning star rises" – Jesus' kingly return. Peter's point is to keep going back to what the prophetic Scriptures say, until the Second Coming finally happens.

20-21 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

"Prophets... spoke from God as... by the Holy Spirit" – Scripture was written by hand of persons anointed and filled with the Holy Spirit. Therefore the understanding of Scripture is not down to human opinion (as from the false teachers) but by the Spirit-filled church as whole.

REFLECTION God has revealed Himself to Moses and revealed His Son to three of the disciples. The clear and divinely-inspired message of Scripture all points to who Jesus is: the majestic Son of God who came to offer a path of salvation to all who would believe in Him, and who promised to return at the end of the era to rule over a fair and harmonious kingdom. Who Jesus is and His vital role in our lives and eternal life is revelation that takes place in our hearts as we take the step of faith that says "yes" to Him as a decision of trust. We don't know Him, and then decide to trust Him – we trust Him, to know Him. It is like the bright planet Venus heralding the dawn and then light coming into our hearts. Jesus is real, He is the Son of God who rules and reigns in heaven and He will come to earth again to establish His eternal Kingdom.

QUESTION *What is your story about taking the step of faith that says "yes" to trusting God? At what point did you grasp the reality of who Jesus is, and how did that move you to respond to Him?*

PRAYER Dear Father, You may not often call us up a mountain to talk to us, but You do reveal Your plans to us in many ways as we seek you. Enliven us by Your Holy Spirit to hear You, to perceive Your kingdom purpose over and above the conflicts and complexities of life, and to know how we should pray and join You in what you are doing. To the glory of Jesus, Amen.

What does the event on the mountain top teach us?

Jesus' transfiguration, being joined by Moses and Elijah and hearing the audible voice of God was terrifying – but also assuring for the disciples, who were coming to terms with what Jesus had told them would happen to Him in Jerusalem.

Jesus' transfiguration showed them a glimpse of God's purpose, and how it was far greater than the events of their time – or ours. As Peter later related in his letter, the mountaintop experience dramatically reminded them that God knew the end from the beginning.

Perhaps more readily than us, as those who had been brought up on the words of the prophets and the much talked-about return of the Messiah, the transfiguration gave them a glimpse of heavenly glory – the glory they associated with the King or kings at the end time. They had seen a trailer for the sequel!

This gives us the same confidence: in all of life we do not understand, God has a plan, and He knows the end from the beginning. We can trust Him to work it out!

The Living Word

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Bible readings for Sunday, February 23, 2020, with explanatory notes

Bible study on the Revised Common Lectionary passages for **February 23**
Prepare by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on the pulpit teaching

Theme: The mountain top encounters which reveal God's plan for us

Exodus 24:12-18 – God summons Moses to wait on Mount Sinai and meet Him

Matthew 17:1-9 – God's voice is heard as Jesus is transfigured

2 Peter 1:16-21 – Jesus will surely come again as Scripture tells us

Also read: Psalm 2 or Psalm 99

Exodus 24:12-18 – God summons Moses to meet Him on Mt Sinai

After six days he hears God call and enters the cloud

12 The LORD said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone with the law and commandments I have written for their instruction."

"Come up to Me" -- at this time of establishing the first covenant, only Moses could draw near to God.

+ Good News for us: By contrast, under the post-resurrection second covenant we are all called to draw near to God, which we are enabled to do through Jesus. Read Matthew 7:7-11, Hebrews 4:4-16, Hebrews 7:19, Hebrews 10:22, James 4:8.

"I will give you the tablets" – first mention of the divine directives inscribed on stone. The custom for ancient Near Eastern treaties was for each party to deposit a copy in the other's temple, which might explain the two tablets. In this case both God's tablet and man's would be kept in the Ark.

13 Then Moses set out with Joshua his aide, and Moses went up on the mountain of God.

Joshua his aide – first mention of Joshua in this significant role. It appears that Joshua helped Moses on the climb up Mount Sinai but was not 'cleared' to come right into the presence of the Lord.

14 He said to the elders, "Wait here for us until we come back to you. Aaron and

Hur are with you, and anyone involved in a dispute can go to them."

"Hur" – who had helped Aaron hold up Moses' hands in praise as the battle of Amalek proceeded below them on the plain, Exodus 17:10-13.

15-16 When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from within the cloud.

"Six days... seventh" – a possible allusion to creation. Moses and Joshua waited on God in faithful worship, in the tradition of Abraham's faithfulness. By contrast, the Israelites did not wait as instructed, but broke their vigil and began to worship a golden calf, Exodus 32.

17 To the Israelites the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain.

"Glory of the Lord" – a plainly visible and brilliant presence. Moses had seen such a fire in the burning bush, Exodus 3:2.

18 Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

"Moses entered" – and Joshua remained outside the cloud while Moses stayed "forty days", a term indicating a long time rather than an exact duration.

REFLECTION Moses was tested by difficulties as he prepared to meet God on the mountain. He had met God previously at the burning bush encounter (Exodus 3:6) and that memory of encountering God in His majesty and holiness was a still a frightening one. This mountain ascent was difficult. He would have to leave the rather wayward tribes to their own devices for a time – it turned out to be weeks, not days. He would have to draw on faith, trust and patience in large measure, going where no one else could go, doing what for another person would spell certain death by coming face to face with God Almighty. God often tests and stretches our faith when we need His direction – He needs to know, and perhaps we need to know, whether we are sincere about seeking Him. *The huge shift for us now, is that drawing close to God is no longer a privilege restricted to Moses and his priestly family. Any believer who has submitted to Christ as lord of their lives has become part of His new priesthood, the new order of the post-resurrection New Testament, and can freely draw near to God, for themselves – or standing in the gap for others.*

QUESTION *Where has your faith been tested? How have you grown through it?*

Matthew 17:1-9 – God's voice is heard as Jesus is transfigured

Jesus named as God's Son gave the disciples confidence about God's plan

1 After six days Jesus took with Him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.

"After six days" – following Peter's breakthrough declaration of Jesus being the Christ (or Messiah), Matt. 16:16-17. Luke counts the time as eight days. Matthew, writing for mainly Jewish readers, makes the allusion to Moses waiting six days on Mt Sinai.

2 There He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.

"He was transfigured" – "His appearance changed from the inside out, right before their eyes" (The Message).

"His face shone" – as did Moses' as he encountered God's glory, Exodus 34:29-30, 35.

3 Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

"There appeared... Moses and Elijah" – with similarities to Moses' experience on the mountain, now clearly showing Jesus to be unique and superior to these renowned historic figures, representing the law and the prophets respectively.

4 Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up

three shelters – one for You, one for Moses and one for Elijah."

"Three shelters" – shelters as memorials (NLT) or tabernacles, as in the feast of that name. All Jewish men were used to making such tents. Peter simply wanted to preserve and commemorate the moment.

5 While He was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!"

"A bright cloud" – following the appearance of Moses and Elijah, the presence and the shekinah, visible glory of God, covers them. As in Moses' encounter, Exodus 24:16, the voice of God comes from the cloud. They hear His voice pronounce the same words as at Jesus' baptism, Matt. 3:17, with the addition of the command to listen to Him.

"Listen to Him!" – from Deuteronomy 18:15. Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, has come to fulfil a messianic purpose in which He speaks for God. The disciples must hear this.

6 When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified.

"Facedown... terrified" – the fear of God is the awesome reality of the phenomenon of God's presence. This is a scene which would make anyone terrified, but Jesus' intention is to reveal... and encourage.

7-8 But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

"They saw no one" – the experience was not to be prolonged.

9 As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone

what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

"Don't tell" – the purpose of the visitation was to reveal Christ for who He was, but an essential part of that, the significance of His death and resurrection, would be understood by them only later. They could not explain what they did not yet fully understand.

REFLECTION The problem with the big and often terrifying encounters with God is that we tend to think we need to be invited to meet Him on a mountain. Mountains can certainly be 'thin places' where the curtains of heaven seem more ready to draw back a little, and allow us a glimpse within. But we, as present day disciples of Jesus, are charged to be ready for Him at any time – prepared for His return. Before that happens, we should be just as ready and expectant for His everyday *fellowship*, or to use the older word, *communion*. Sharing the cup and breaking the bread with one another is just one special way to experience the fellowship of the Lord, unseen but present in the gathering. *What about being ready to step aside, go somewhere quiet and different, and wait on Him for whatever He will give you? Not because you should, but because you can.*

QUESTION *God's word to the frightened disciples was "Listen to Him!" How good or not very good are you, at listening to Jesus and taking on board what He says?*

2 Peter 1:16-21 – Jesus will surely come again as Scripture tells us

An eyewitness reminds us to pay attention to the prophetic message

16 For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

"Cleverly devised stories" – literally 'invented myths' which was the accusation made by false teachers who were dismissing the promise of Christ's return and judgment. Peter relates his irrefutable firsthand experience and warns against this heresy, 2 Peter 3:3-4.

"Eyewitnesses of His majesty" – Peter, James and John witnessed the transfiguration, which revealed Jesus as the Son and gave a foretaste of His return as king of His eternal kingdom..

• **For further study**, see Matt. 17:1-8 (above) and Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36.

17 He received honour and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased."

"The Majestic Glory" – Jews were anxious to avoid using God's name and "The Glory" was a form of words to overcome this; for Jews it would reinforce the connection between Jesus' transfiguration and Moses' encounter on Mt Sinai.

18 We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with Him on the sacred mountain.

"We ourselves heard this voice" – corrupt and wayward church leadership was a problem the apostles frequently faced. They had staked their lives on the certainty of the gospel, and their eyewitness status added to their unique call by Jesus as the true authorities of His Church.

19 We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

"Also... the prophetic message" – the Hebrew