

## Doorway to a Decade – I Peter 1:13-23

In which camp are you? There are people who believe each **new decade begins** on **January 1**, in a year which **ends in 1**. They correctly say that life began on the first day of the first year of time – January 1, 01. So our next decade will begin on January 1, 2021. Back in 1999, the US Naval Observatory, the agency that maintains the country's master clock, was asked to determine when new millennium would begin. It was their official position that the 21<sup>st</sup> century and second millennium would begin on Jan. 1, 2001. And when the Farmer's Almanac agrees that must set it in stone. But common society often doesn't care about facts, science and details. So there so many who say our last decade ended Tuesday, and with 2020 we have begun a new ten year period. In which camp do you belong?

Of course it doesn't really matter, because Jehovah, who is not bound by time, nevertheless governs time. He has stopped the solar clock a time or two, and in **Exodus 12:2** He even changed the calendar. And when He did that He gave us grounds to make any New Year a time of new beginnings, whether it is also a beginning a new decade or a new century.

As I say in **Exodus 12:2** God changed the Jewish calendar. I doubt very much that the Egyptians or anyone else paid any attention. Assuming they had a calendar, they just kept on with the system they had in place. But I wonder if different countries had their own calendars, and if so, did that cause international problems? What kind of calendar had the Jews been using prior to the time of the switch, and from where did it come? Were their only time pieces the sun and moon? Had they been using the Egyptian calendar – since they had been Egyptian slaves for centuries? Or was this the calendar Abraham and Jacob used before Egypt? Did Adam and Noah use the same system, or was there no yearly calendar at all? What was its source? Creation? The Lord Himself itself design the calendar, or was it man-devised? We'll have to await access the data banks of Heaven before we know the answers to those questions.

Anyway, in **Exodus 12** God changed the executive desk calendar and ordered a new first day of a new year. It is equivalent to our April, but it had been the old Jewish 6<sup>th</sup> month. In other words, their original calendar started in autumn, not January. How confusing. The Lord called the new month "**Abib**," which means "**sprouting**" or "**budding**" – a new beginning. *"And Moses said unto the people, Remember this day, in which ye came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out from this place: there shall no leavened bread be eaten. This day came ye out in the month Abib"* – **Exodus 13:3-4**. So the name for the first month in the Hebrew religious calendar appropriately refers to a new beginning. Their year began with the month of their national salvation.

And where does our first month of the calendar – "**January**" – come from? It comes from Roman idolatry. **Janus** was the Roman god of gates and doors. He is depicted on ancient coins with two faces pointing opposite directions. Somebody decided that he'd be a good door-keeper for the new year. And thus came "**January**."

A few years ago a lady wrote telling me that Christians who used pagan names and festivals were cursed of God for participating in idolatry. I wrote back that just because something touched on idolatry in some way, that doesn't create an idolater. For example, Paul said that to eat meat which the butcher dedicated to a false god, didn't make the Christian a worshiper of that false god – even indirectly. To go to church on "**Sunday**" doesn't make us worshipers of the Sun. And for the 7th Day people, to worship on "**Saturday**," doesn't mean that their particular heresy is the worship of Saturn. They have other doctrinal problems for which they will have to answer. For a lady to wear ear-rings doesn't mean that she's idol worshiping, even though that was the original use of ear-rings. To cremate someone, rather than to bury him, doesn't make him an idolatrous Hindus or Viking. As far as I know **all** the days of the week, and **all** the months of the year, refer to false gods. It would be nice if we could change January to something like "**Genesis-uary**" There is a Biblical-type word which refers to new beginnings. But that change in calendars isn't going to happen any time before the return of the Lord. And will we need clocks or calendars in eternity when the Lord Himself will be our sun?

But getting back to new calendars and new beginnings. What sort of new beginnings ought we to make at this time of the year? I hesitate to use the word "**resolutions**" – the word that the world uses. "**New Year Resolutions**" are a common joke, and the people who make them are often laughed at. But putting that word aside, what things ought to be added to your life; what things should be subtracted? When was the last time you implemented a plan to read the Bible through in 366 days? (Yes, this is a leap year – something with which the Jews never had to concern themselves.) Perhaps its time to start giving to missions unlike anything that you've done before. Will it be this year

that you read one good solid Christian book each month – or each quarter? What year was it that you last read four Christian books? Maybe it's this year that you need to dedicate yourself to some new ministry. On the other hand, perhaps it is time to delete some things from our lives. Some of us have horrible tempers that we need to surgically remove. Are you a person of fear or worry? Is pride your problem? To what are you addicted? Let's permit Pastor Peter to make some suggestions in regard to these things. Let's say that 2020 is another mile on the road that we are traveling. Obviously, we've not reached the destination yet, in fact we're just getting our shoes on. We are *"sojourners"* – **verse 17** – wayfarers, pilgrims of the year. And what is at the end of the road? The grace and revelation of the Lord Jesus. *"Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."*

**Peter makes some suggestions for a profitable pilgrimage – and later gives us some solid arguments.**

He said, *"Gird up the loins of your mind."* I've already referred to **Exodus**, which is basically the history of Israel's departure from Egypt. What sort of preparations were made for the actual exodus? First, there were preparations for the Passover – when God's death angel was to pass over the land. Israel was told to ask their Egyptian neighbors for remuneration for their years of servitude. Then there was the packing and the dressing. And then came the Passover itself, the proper painting of blood on the doorposts of their homes. Those Hebrews were supposed to eat the Passover meal, their final meal as Egyptian slaves, with their shoes on and their loins girt. *"Girding up the loins"* meant binding the robes up close, so that people could travel quickly and unimpaired. For most men these days that is already done for us in the design of our clothing. But for them it was a little more entailed.

Today we don't have to gird up our clothes for travel, but Peter wasn't talking about clothing; he said *"mind."* We need to gird up the loins of our minds, whether we are traveling or staying at home. There is nothing quite as ugly and useless as a *"flabby"* mind. That was an adjective that an old Bible-school professor of mine like to use. A few years ago while on vacation, Judy and I were in a church where one of the relatives attends. And we heard a reasonably good sermon – a rehash of a hundred other sermons. I had no complaints or criticisms of the message; it was simply a good, gospel sermon. But there was nothing of substance in it, nothing new, nothing that stirred my already saved soul. You may often say that about sermons you hear at this church, but that is not my point. I am not criticizing that message. But there happened to be another visiting preacher there that day, and he was well-known enough to be invited to close the service in prayer. When he rose to feet, he began to extol that sermon in prayer, eventually calling it a *"classic."* He led us to believe the message just preached was one of the best ever, and God would have to agree. His comments made me wonder what shallow, tepid, elementary messages that preacher feeds to his people week after week. If what we heard that day was a *"classic"* what sort of sermon is just ordinary or plain. I fear that pastor was suffering from a flabby mind. We display our limp and flaccid thinking in various ways – even religiously. I have to admit that it isn't just the average Contemporary Christian Music, but even the better recent congregational hymns.... I have to wonder if modern song writers and song singers have the same mental capacity that William Cowper, Isaac Watts and even Fanny Crosby and P.P. Bliss had. How many hymn writers and common saints these days *"study to show their praise approved unto God?"* Where are the saints who have *"sanctified the Lord God in their hearts and are ready to give an answer to every man who asks about the hope that is within them?"* There is nothing that saddens me quite as much as professing Christians who refuse – REFUSE – to recognize clearly outlined doctrines in the Word of God. Why are there so many people who can't explain some of the simplest of Biblical doctrines?

In our society today, there is a great deal of concern about flabby bodies – but few care about flabby souls and brains. So many Christians are filled with useless worry, fear and jealousy, because of their lack of faith in God. So many are consumed with hatred and impurity; they are mentally and spiritually lazy. They feed their minds on mental junk food: popular magazines, romance novels and tabloid news papers. They soak up TV calories, fashion magazine calories, and newspaper calories. But the good clean meat and vegetables of the Word of God they rarely taste, and even less, digest. Peter exhorts us all to *"gird up the loins of our minds"*.

And he says, *"Be sober,"* that is, have a calm, collected, **serious** spirit. To be sober is to be vigilant in guarding against the spiritual dangers that surround us. It means to be alert to temptations and to be capable of fighting off their attack. Christians need to remember the Trojan horse; trouble can come in innocent packages. Christian, let's be sober and victorious over our besetting sins. A Christians' work is not over at the time of his salvation; that is when it really begins. We all begin our spiritual lives in January; in *"Abib."*

And we owe it to ourselves to *"hope to the end"* – trust God until the day of our perfection. But also to work on our

faith, energize our faith, strengthen it; take it to the 24 hour spiritual fitness place. *“Without faith it is impossible to please God”* and *“and whatsoever is not of faith is sin.”* – **Romans 13:23**. Anything which we do within or without the Lord’s service which is not empowered by faith is sin. *“Oh Lord, we believe, help our unbelief.”*

Next, Peter says *“walk in obedience.”* Remember when Paul said that we were children of disobedience, **Ephesians 2?** His next words were – *“we walked according to the course of the world.”* Peter says that Christians ought not to be worldly-fashioned. Our outward appearance shouldn’t be patterned after the world. Paul said, *“Be not conformed to this world.”* Neither of those apostles would deliberately choose to look like they were idolaters. They chose to be obedient to God as dear Children. When it comes to obedience we all need to learn how, when and whom to obey. When the Lord tells us to attack personal sin we must attack. And if He says, retreat from some sin’s temptation, then that’s what we must do. Even Jesus, the Son of God, deity incarnate, learned obedience.

And He walked through the years of His journey in holiness, as we should. This is our calling – *“ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”* We have been saved in order to be saints, people of holiness. We are to be people separate from the world of sin and separated unto the Lord to loved us and bought us. We need to memorize and remind ourselves of **Hebrews 12:14** – *“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”*

One more thing before we move on. **Verse 17** – *“And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.”* As we have said several times recently, *“Not in the fear of man, but in the fear and worship of God.”* *“Pass the time of your sojourning”* – where has the year 2019 gone? If you think that it was a terribly slow year, it means that you weren’t very busy in it. Our lives are but puffs of steam on a cold winters’ day. *“Lord, teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”* *“Teach us to pass our sojourning lives here in awe of the Lord’s providence, handiwork and grace.”*

**Peter has given us six important exhortations, and now he give us his reasons.**

First of all: **the Lord is coming – verse 13**. 70% of all the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah are, as yet, unfulfilled. That doesn’t mean those promises can’t be trusted, rather it should intensify our faith. Every passing year means that Jesus is coming again is nearer than it was before. Our Lord, when he was here, said that He was coming again. All the apostles teach that the Lord will return to earth in power and glory. And there isn’t the slightest reason to say that He will not return and call us to be with Him in 2020.

Among other things, when He comes it will mean judgment for both the Christian and the lost man. Yet it will be with grace greater than anything that we have seen before. *“He shall change our vile bodies that they may be fashioned like unto his glorious body”* *“He will receive us unto himself.”* *“And we know that our light affliction (of the year 2019 and 2020) will not be worthy of comparison to the glory that shall be revealed in us.”* Jesus is coming again, and it is high time to awaken out of our sleepy lethargy. I’ll come back to this subject this evening.

The second argument that Peter uses is the **Lord’s holiness – verse 16**. *“Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.”* God spoke to the people of the first Abib and said, *“I am the Lord who delivered you, be ye holy. For I am the Lord your God, ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves and ye shall be holy for I am holy.”* How can we plan to stand before a holy God, without personal holiness ourselves? Our deliverance from our spiritual Egypt has been far greater – more miraculous – than Israel’s deliverance from their Egypt, so how much more there is that we owe to our Saviour.

Peter’s third argument for making these suggestions is seen in **verse 17 – Judgment**. God is very interested in the quality of your Christian life this upcoming year. He has promised to judge your deeds and to reward your works. Never let that slip from your mind. As you waste another night and skip another church service, ask yourselves what Lord thinks about that. As you turn your back on that opportunity to walk through that open door and to speak to that lost person about the Saviour, remember that the Lord is aware. As you waste your God-given talents, what is the Lord’s opinion? Jesus, our Saviour, is the one who judges the quick and the dead.

But that argument is nothing compared to the last – **verses 18-19**. *“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”* If you are a Christian, you are so by the shed blood of the Son of God.

What if you were kidnaped, and a stranger paid a \$100,000 for your release? Wouldn’t you have some sort of affection for him? Jesus paid infinitely more for your redemption than money. He gave his life as a ransom for your

soul. We owe the Lord this coming year; we owe the Lord our very lives.