

Tuesday Evening Bible Study
Series #9: 1 Peter, Jude and 2 Peter
Session #5: Introduction to 2 Peter
Tuesday, October 31, 2017

Summary

An early Christian teacher turns his attention to what he views as alarming trends in the church: skepticism over the return of Christ, moral laxity, divisiveness, claims of unique spiritual insight, and denial of the final judgment. The tenor of the letter is at the same time tenacious in its colorful use of rhetoric and relentlessly pastoral in its single-minded concern for the well-being and authenticity of the church and its witness.

Who wrote it and when?

Arguments based on genre, language and style, and doctrinal concerns prompt a majority of scholars to conclude that an unknown author wrote this book sometime after the Apostle Peter's death. Others argue that Peter wrote it or that someone else wrote it during Peter's lifetime. The belief that the letter's teachings reflect a setting after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. and a context in which the original apostles had all died leads many scholars to suggest a date between 80 C.E. and 90 C.E. Some suggest a much later date, in the first half of the second century. No portion of the New Testament canon has had its legitimacy debated and challenged more than this book. Of the 27 books of the NT, 2 Peter had the least support in antiquity. The arguments against its having been written by the Apostle Peter are much more fully developed than those mounted in its favor. It was largely unknown or ignored until about 350 CE, and even after that many, such as Sts. Jerome, Origen, and Eusebius rejected it. These contrary positions are complicated, but they appeal to vocabulary, modes of expression, the issues which seem at or below the surface, and the letter's dependence on the Letter of Jude, which is usually judged to be more consistent and convincing as a document reflecting the time of the apostles. 2 Peter also makes use of words and constructions that do not appear anywhere else in the NT (*hapax legomena*). Wherever the Second Letter of Peter came from, and whenever it was written, it can be read as a spirited summons delivered to the church during a transitional period, when the last of the apostles had passed away and Christians were having to adjust to new realities.

What is the context in which it was written?

As the early church seeks to regroup in the aftermath of the death of the last of the apostles, a teacher in the lineage of Peter brings words of warning: stay close to the apostolic teaching, do not be shaken from hope in Christ's return, and live in compassion and integrity.

How do I read 2 Peter?

Scholars are not in complete agreement concerning what combination of "epistle" and "testament" this book represents. As a letter, the book conveys something of the personal and heartfelt nature of pastoral correspondence. As a testament, it captures the author's resolve to keep the life and health of the church aligned closely to the teaching of its founder, the Apostle Peter, like the last words of advice and warning given by a patriarch to his children before his death. There is also no customary final greeting.

Outline of 2 Peter

- A. Salutation (1:1-2)
- B. Body of the Letter (1:3 – 3:16)
 - a. An Exhortation to Progress and Virtue (1:3-21)
 - i. Peter's Testament (1:3-15)
 - ii. The Grounds of Christian Hope (1:16-21)
 - b. Condemnation of False teachers (2:1-22)
 - i. False Teachers (2:1-3)
 - ii. Biblical Precedents (2:4-11)
 - iii. Denunciations (2:12-22)
 - c. Delay of the 2nd Coming (*parousia*) (3:1-16)
 - i. The Promise of the Lord's Coming (3:1-10)
 - ii. Final Exhortations (3:11-18a)
- C. Doxology (3:18b)

Notes

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- 2 Peter draws upon elements of Jewish, Greek, and Christian traditions
 - Jewish
 - The author makes use of several examples from the OT, including some apocryphal examples (e.g., rebellious angels [2 Peter 2:4])
 - Greek
 - The author makes use of Greek terms, concepts, philosophical ideas, and grammatical constructions.
 - Christian
 - He makes reference to a previous letter written, as well as to “the beloved brother Paul” and “all his letters” (3:15-16)

Parallels to the Epistle of Jude

2 Peter	Jude
2.1	4
2.4	6
2.6	7
2.10a	7-8
2.10b-11	8-9
2.12	10
2.13	12
2.15	11
2.17	12-13, 16
3.2	17
3.3	18

Resources

Notes from HarperCollins Study Bible (NRSV), 1989

“2 Peter” in *Sacra Pagina*, Daniel J. Harrington, ed. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2008)

Raymond E. Brown, “Second Epistle of Peter” in *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997)

“2 Peter” in *The New Testament*, ed. by the Committee to Promote the Study of the Bible, 1997