

2 Peter

Authorship

A majority of scholars have rejected 2 Peter as a genuine work of the apostle. There is no question that the author intends to be taken as Simon, the apostle and servant of Jesus Christ. This is seen in the contents as well as the salutation (cf. 1:14, 16-18; 3:1, 15). The only alternative is that it is pseudepigraphal, which, though assumed to be a valid practice of the ancient world, has not been demonstrated to be in keeping with the whole tenor of biblical writings.¹

Date

Since Peter alludes to his own passing as imminent (1:12-15), the book is datable to just prior to his martyrdom. Finegan dates the deaths of Peter and Paul as A.D. 67.² Therefore, early in A.D. 67 is the probable date of the writing of 2 Peter.

Historical Setting

Peter is imprisoned in Rome awaiting certain execution. Christianity has become sufficiently distinct from Judaism that it has come under official persecution, especially at the hands of Nero, who himself is nearing the end.

Original Readers

The vague reference of the salutation have caused some to question whether they are the same groups as those mentioned in 1 Peter 1:1, since the second epistle mentioned in 2 Peter 3:1 may refer to some letter other than 1 Peter. Whatever the case may be, it is clear that Peter has instructed this group in the past and wishes to remind them of what he had said and to build on that foundation (cf. 1:13, 15; 3:1). Assuming that the 3:1 reference is to 1 Peter, the readership must include Gentile Christians, though the presence of Jewish believers may be reasonably assumed.³

¹ See Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th ed. rev. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 805-42 for a complete discussion of the authorship question. The internal evidence for Petrine authorship is argued by Zane C. Hodges, "2 Peter," unpublished class notes (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1972), 4-11.

² In fact, June 29, A.D. 67 to be precise! Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 387.

³ See Guthrie, *Introduction*, 842-43.

Occasion

There is no specific circumstance that has prompted Peter's writing other than his imminent death coupled with the desire to encourage the church in their faith, especially in light of the challenges presented by certain false teachers.

Special Issues

Relation to Jude. The fact that most of 2 Peter 2 is paralleled in Jude raises the question of relationship. There are three possibilities: (1) Jude is prior to 2 Peter (2) 2 Peter is used by Jude (3) they both used the same source.⁴ A majority hold that Peter used Jude. Guthrie concludes that it is impossible to prove any of the views but favors the priority of 2 Peter and Jude's borrowing from him.⁵ In this case Peter has set the stage for what will happen in the future, and Jude has picked up on that, writing about what is presently taking place with regard to the false teachers.⁶

Message

In light of Christ's assured coming, Christians ought to be growing in grace and knowledge of Him so as to be ready.

Outline

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| I. | Salutation: Peter writes as servant and apostle to fellow believers. | 1:1-2 |
| | A. Peter identifies himself as an original apostle. | 1:1a |
| | B. Peter identifies with the readership as one a fellow believer. | 1:1b |
| | C. Peter identifies the goal of his writing as grace and peace in the knowledge of God and Jesus. | 1:2 |
| II. | Prologue: Knowledge of the divine has given believers a supernatural advantage and an eternal perspective. | 1:3-11 |
| | A. The past has seen the believer established in Christ. | 1:3-4 |
| | 1. The believer has received resources for living a godly life. | 1:3 |
| | 2. The believer has received promises for participation in the divine nature. | 1:4 |
| | B. The present holds the challenge of developing Christian character. | 1:5-9 |
| | C. The future holds forth the possibility of kingdom abundance. | 1:10-11 |
| III. | Body: The coming of Jesus Christ is adequate motivation for godly living in the present. | 1:12-3:13 |
| | A. Authoritative testimony has been given to certify His coming. | 1:12-21 |
| | 1. The apostle's experience and example have confirmed it. | 1:12-15 |

⁴Ibid., 916-25.

⁵ Ibid., 923-25.

⁶ Ibid., 921.

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| 2. | The prophetic word has assured it. | 1:16-21 |
| a. | The apostles had been eyewitness to divine testimony confirming the Lord's coming. | 1:16-18 |
| b. | The prophetic word had received divine confirmation concerning the Lord's coming. | 1:19-21 |
| B. | False teachers, by tempting believers, will seek to obscure the reality of His coming. | 2:1-22 |
| 1. | False teachers will arise to blaspheme the way of truth. | 2:1-3a |
| 2. | The false teachers, already under the doom of judgment, will tempt the righteous. | 2:3b-9 |
| 3. | The false teachers, who will perish in their corruption, are only blemishes to the Christian fellowship. | 2:10-17 |
| 4. | The false teachers, themselves the slaves of corruption, lure believers back into the bondage of flesh. | 2:18-22 |
| C. | False teachers, scoffing at the promise of His coming, do not nullify its certainty. | 3:1-13 |
| 1. | Rejection of the coming of the Lord is discounted. | 3:1-9 |
| a. | Their scoffing over the delay of His coming was not a surprise. | 3:1-4 |
| b. | Their scoffing over delay discounts past patterns of God's judgment. | 3:5-6 |
| c. | Their scoffing over delay displays ignorance of God's ways. | 3:7-9 |
| 2. | Certainty of the coming of the Lord is displayed. | 3:10-13 |
| a. | The coming of the Lord will bring judgment. | 3:10 |
| b. | The coming of the Lord ought to result in holy conduct. | 3:11-13 |
| IV. | Concluding Admonition: The believer must live with an eye to the coming of the Lord. | 3:14-18 |
| A. | It provides opportunity to prepare for his evaluation. | 3:14-15a |
| B. | It accords with Paul's instruction. | 3:15b-16 |
| C. | It necessitates growing in grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. | 3:17-18 |

Argument

In the face of his execution, the apostle Peter continues to obey the Lord's commission to tend His sheep (John 21:16) and strengthen his own brethren (Luke 22:32). He has instructed these believers in the faith and wishes to reinforce that teaching and to warn them of the dangers they will face from false teachers. His prescriptive admonition is to keep growing in grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I. Salutation: Peter writes as servant and apostle to fellow believers (1:1-2).

In no uncertain terms Peter establishes both the authority from which he speaks and his own solidarity in the faith with the readership. Both stem from the righteousness of Christ extended by grace. His ultimate aim, repeated in the last verse of the book (3:19) is

that they be growing in the grace and in the experiential understanding of Christ as their entire sufficiency.

II. Prologue: Knowledge of the divine has given believers a supernatural advantage and an eternal perspective (1:3-11).

As a preface to his concern, Peter reminds them of their great position, privilege, and provision in Christ (1:3-4) which becomes the basis for an appeal to continue developing a distinctively Christian character (1:5-9). If they do this, then they will be fully rewarded when Christ returns to establish His kingdom (1:10-11). This past, present, future pattern will occur throughout the book as Peter deals with the threat of the false teachers in light of who believers were in Christ and what they had to look forward to when He returned.

III. Body: The coming of Jesus Christ is adequate motivation for godly living in the present (1:12-3:13).

The coming (*parousia*) of the Lord refers to Christ's second advent, predicted while He was still on earth (cf. Matt 24:27) and made a main feature of apostolic proclamation following His ascension. It is this coming that is so positively longed for by the believer and so vilified by the false teachers.

A. Authoritative testimony has been given to certify His coming (1:12-21).

Peter appeals to his presence at the Transfiguration as the basis for his confidence that Christ would one day return (1:16-18). In addition, the church had in its possession the prophetic Scriptures as divinely authorized testimony that Christ would return as the dawn of a new (eschatological) day (1:19-21). This two-pronged testimony, though completely adequate, will none the less be countered and scoffed at by false teachers, to whom Peter now directs his attention.

B. False teachers, by tempting believers, will seek to obscure the reality of His coming (2:1-22).

The essence of the false teachers' doctrine is a denial of the atoning work of Christ. Though invited to come to Him for salvation, they will deny the efficacy of His work and bring on themselves destruction (2:1). Because of this, Christianity will be ill spoken of and believers themselves will be exploited (2:2-3) and tempted in the area of their conduct (3:4-9). In the end, the false teachers will perish, while believers will be delivered (2:9-10). However, in the meantime, the behavior of these profligates will blemish the fellowship of the church (2:12-17); by their words the false teachers will work at bringing believers back

into bondage to the lusts of the flesh, a temporal condition that will in many ways make their daily living experience worse than before they were saved (2:21-22).

C. False teachers, scoffing at the promise of His coming, do not nullify its certainty (3:1-13).

For all the doctrinal confusion and behavioral mayhem that the false teachers may cause, the Lord's return is certain. They may scoff all they wish at the delay, and live however they may please in the meantime (3:1-4). However, what the false teachers ignore is the fact that God alone establishes the timetable of judgment (3:5-8), and that any delay is a matter of mercy (3:9). Judgment will most certainly come (3:10); when it does believers ought to be prepared, armed with a life of holy conduct and godliness (3:11). If anything can hasten that day, it is the readiness of the saints (3:12-13). What the false teachers scoff at, the believer respects, developing a life that will be pleasing to Him when He appears.

IV. Concluding Admonition: The believer must live with an eye to the coming of the Lord (3:14-18).

Peter concludes by exhorting these believers to a life of preparedness, summarized with respect to two areas: harmony among themselves and personal holiness (3:14). Living with an eye to the judgment seat of Christ is, after all, in line with the teaching of Paul, whose letters were already coming to be recognized as having Scriptural authority (3:15-16). There is ample motivation for spiritually responsible living (3:17). However, it is not a static requirement; each believer must continue to grow in the ability to live by grace which will be directly proportional to their increase in understanding of the person and ways of the Lord Jesus Christ (3:18).

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