

THE SECOND EPISTLE GENERAL OF PETER

INTRODUCTION

Second Peter, like first Peter, is a general epistle, meaning that it is not addressed to a specific person, area, or church. Therefore, it is a “circular” letter, meaning that it is meant to be read, then passed around to others.

As the Church grew and spread, it brought a plethora of false teachers spreading counterfeit doctrines. This then is the importance of Peter’s second general epistle. Written in response to false teachers and doctrines, as well as a warning to its readers of these groups.

2 Peter 1:19-21 We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

What's more, in this letter, Peter points out that he was an eyewitness to the glory (read Transfiguration) of Jesus (2Pe 1:16-18) and that he was familiar with the ministry of the apostle Paul (2Pe 3:15-16).

AUTHOR

In the introduction (2Pe 1:1-2), the apostle Peter identifies himself differently than his first epistle.

2 Peter 1:1-2 Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.

His inclusion of his “pre” - Simon and “post” – Peter, name given by Jesus Christ is interesting.

- Simon – Hebrew, nine Israelites have this name.
- Peter – Greek *Petros* and Cephias – Chaldean/Aramaic is the name given by Jesus to Simon at his call to become a disciple (Jn1:42), meaning “piece of rock.” This is the name by which he is referred in the NT.
- Simon Peter, Simon called Peter - Mt 4:18; 10:2; 16:16; Mk 3:16; 14:37; Lu 5:8; 6:14; Joh 1:40; 6:8, 68; 13:6, 9, 24, 36; 18:10, 15, 25; 20:2, 6; 21:2-3, 7, 11, 15, 17; Ac 1:13; 10:5, 17-18, 32; 11:13; 2Pe 1:1.

DATE

It is generally considered that this epistle was written from Rome a short time after Peter’s first epistle. It is also considered to have been written just prior to Peter’s martyrdom. Peter appears to be in prison, in Rome awaiting his execution. This is clearly seen in his anticipation of the event.

2 Peter 1:14 Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me.

Therefore, the date of this epistle is firmly attached on the dating of Peter’s execution. If Peter was martyred in Rome in 64 AD, it was during the reign of the Roman Emperor Nero. That would make the date of this epistle between 63-64 AD. Some suggest that Peter was martyred at a later date, 67 AD, then the date of its writing would be 66-67 AD.

AUDIENCE

Different from his first letter, this epistle was written to an unnamed group of believers. Peter refers to a “second epistle.”

2 Peter 3:1 This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance.

Considering that Peter’s reference to a “second epistle” being this epistle, then his second letter is written to the same audience as the first epistle, that is “*to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.*” (1Pe 1:1)

THEME

Simply stated, the theme of this epistle centers on how a believer in Jesus Christ should live in the face of heretical teaching. Therefore, if false teachers are left unchecked, it would have a negative influence on believer in how they are to live an honest and principled life.

PURPOSE AND CONTENT

There are some logical considerations concerning the idea that 2 Peter does not contain much of Peter’s theology. At first glance I would argue that this epistle only has three chapters, sixty-one verses, one thousand five hundred and fifty three words. That is not very much space to include all of Peter’s theology (Petrine theology).

The first theme that is seen in this epistle is that of the message of grace (2Pe 1:2). Peter later exhorts the readers to “*grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.*”

Peter never even considered the notion that the salvation bestowed in Christ could be untethered from moral transformation. He wrote to a situation in which antinomian opponents threatened the church, and hence he naturally stressed the life-changing work of Jesus Christ.¹

Peter reminds his readers that orthodoxy is and should be the accepted view. The word 'Orthodox' takes its meaning from the Greek words *orthos* ('right') and *doxa* ('belief'). Hence the word Orthodox means correct belief or right thinking.

Peter confronts that accepting false teaching will result in immorality. This was a red flag for Peter. Therefore, Peter is making the case that believers should rely on “right belief” when it comes to Jesus Christ and the Grace of God... “*knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord*” (2Pe1:2). This is the platform that Peter builds upon throughout this letter, that the believer can overcome the persecution, even the death that may come to many of his readers, through the work of Jesus Christ, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, “*Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*” (2Pe 1:4)

Peter drives the point, that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within the believer produces a Christ-like life.

2 Peter 1:5-8 And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these

¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 254–255.

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things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Early in the letter, Peter addresses the importance on relying on the revelation from God. The testimony of the apostles was not of human making, but instead were reliable testimonies from God (2Pe 1:16-21). Therefore, the acceptance of false teaching is to be considered perilous and alarming (2Pe 2:1-3)

In this second letter, Peter describes some of the perversion of the truth that was being taught to these fledgling congregations...that Jesus was not going to return, therefore, the believer could live anyway they wanted. Hence the section that the Day of the Lord is certainly going to happen and that his readers should live in this truth.

KEY THOUGHT/CENTRAL MESSAGE

Peter presented this epistle with a different message than his first. The first epistle, Peter speaks of the “new birth” found through the “living word”, to encourage his readers in how they should respond to opposition from outside the church. The second letter emphasizes the need for “spiritual growth” within the church body. Therefore, the second epistle focuses on “internal” hostility caused by false teachers (2Pe 2:1-2).

2 Peter 2:1-2 (KJV) But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. 2 And many shall follow their pernicious² ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.

PARALLEL PASSAGES

Old Testament Quotes

- Pr 1:7; 19:2; Hos 4:6
- Deu 4:21;31:14
- Ex 3:5; Josh 5:15
- Is 8:20
- 2Sam 23:2
- Deu 13:1
- Job 4:18
- Gen 7:1
- Gen 19:24
- Ps 34:17
- Jer 12:3
- Nm 22
- Pr 26:11
- Is 5:19; Jer 17:15; Ezek 12:22
- Ge 1:6; Ps 33:6
- Ge 7:11
- Ps 90:4
- Hab 2:3; Is 30:18; Ezek 18:23; 33:11
- Ps 50:3; Is 34:4; Mic 1:4

2 Peter

- 2Pe 1:5
- 2Pe 1:14
- 2Pe 1:18
- 2Pe 1:19
- 2Pe 1:21
- 2Pe 2:1
- 2Pe 2:4
- 2Pe 2:5
- 2Pe 2:6
- 2Pe 2:9
- 2Pe 2:12
- 2Pe 2:15
- 2 Pe 2:22
- 2Pe 3:4
- 2Pe 3:5
- 2Pe 3:6
- 2Pe 3:8
- 2Pe 3:9
- 2Pe 3:12

² Pernicious (Greek apoleias) “ruin or loss (physical, spiritual, or eternal), having a harmful effect, especially in a gradual or subtle way.

- Is 65:17; 66:22

2Pe 3:13

THE KEY VERSE/PASSAGE

Key Verse/s

2 Peter 1:5 (KJV) And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; 6 And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; 7 And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

2 Peter 1:10 (KJV) Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:

2 Peter 1:21 (KJV) For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

2 Peter 2:1 (KJV) But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

2 Peter 3:3 (KJV) Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, 4 And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

2 Peter 3:8 (KJV) But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

2 Peter 3:9 (KJV) The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

Key Word/s & Phrases

- Jesus Christ 2Pe 1:1-2, 8, 11, 14, 16; 2:20; 3:18
- God 2Pe 1:1-2, 17, 21; 2:4; 3:5, 12
- Lord 2Pe 1:2, 8, 11, 14, 16; 2:1, 9, 11, 20; 3:2, 8-10, 15, 18
- Faith 2Pe 1:1, 5
- Grace 2Pe 1:2, 3:18
- Word 2Pe 1:19; 3:5, 7
- Righteousness 2Pe 1:1; 2:5, 21; 3:13
- Mercy
- Love
- Works 2Pe 3:10
- Perfect
- Trial
- Salvation 2Pe 3:15
- Promise 2Pe 2:19; 3:4, 9, 13
- Heavens 2Pe 3:5, 7, 10, 12-13
- False prophets 2Pe 2:1
- Last days 2Pe 3:3
- Knowledge 2Pe 1:2-3, 5-6, 8; 2:20; 3:18
- Destroyed/destruction 2Pe 2:1, 12; 3:16

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- Judgment 2Pe 2:3-4, 9; 3:7

OUTLINE

- I. Greetings (1:1-2)
- II. Salvation (1:3-12)
- III. A Demand for Holiness (1:13-2:3)
- IV. God's People (2:4-10)
 - V. Christian Witness (2:11-3:12)
- VI. Suffering as Christ (3:13-4:19)
- VII. Assurances (5:1-9)
- VIII. Praises to God (5:10-14)³

³ Thomas D. Lea, "The General Letters," in *Holman Concise Bible Commentary*, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 634.