

Study 11: 1st & 2nd Peter Summary

Introduction

This summary is intended to provide a brief review and detailed outline of the letters. It will help us to remember the things that Peter covered, and also to provide an overview if them.

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Homework and preparation for next week:

Read the notes as a review of the study

Read Jude in preparation for the next study.

Study of 1st & 2nd Peter by Graeme Offer

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Notes for study 11: 1st & 2nd Peter Summary

1st & 2nd Peter are practical books that gives us much instruction on the practical application of our faith in the challenges of the real world. They are letters of encouragement to christians who feel like they are away from their homeland.

The suffering of Christ is held as the example throughout the letters. The christians were facing trials and persecutions when they didn't deserve it. They only had to look to Jesus to see that He suffered in the same way.

The underlying theme is christian living in the face of suffering and hostility. Christ, His suffering and overcoming through the resurrection permeates the whole letter.

Our faith is not "blind faith" but is built on evidence. Peter brings that evidence to the fore because he was an eyewitness of Jesus. False teachers were trying to lure away the christians, but we remain certain of the assurance God gives to His children, and Peter continually returns to putting our faith into practice as we focus on the perfect example of Jesus.

Study 1: The Recipients of the Letter

The letter is general in its nature, and addressed to "...*the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia...*" (1:1:1 NKJV). These were all Roman provinces to the north of the Taurus Mountains in what is now modern-day Turkey. The writer claims to be "*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ*". Only one Peter was an apostle. Silas, the companion of Paul scribed it (1:5:12), and it has a short note penned in Peter's own hand (1:5:12-14).

Both the internal and external evidence support Peter as the author of the first epistle, although it is perhaps not as strong for the authorship of the second.

Date and Occasion of the Letter

The early days of the christian church created little resistance from, or conflict with, the Roman government. As the church grew throughout the Empire, it did so with quiet assimilation. However, in the latter days of Nero, the political climate changed significantly, and eventually resulted in the execution of both Peter and Paul. An inevitable question amongst the christians would be whether such persecution would extend further than Rome, and reach into the regions of northern Asia.

The letter was most likely written from Rome, late AD 67 or even early AD 68.

The style of the letter

The letter is intensely practical, and Peter gives specific instructions for dealing with the situations of life that they find themselves in. A key theme permeating the whole letter is the example of Christ in His suffering and overcoming through the resurrection.

Study 2: The Present Situation

Some key themes are introduced early in the letter – the new birth, our hope in Christ, and the resurrection from the dead. Our new birth in Christ results from Christ's action of reconciling us back to God – and of course, by our obedience to Him. We have in the certainty of Jesus' resurrection, the surety of *a living hope* in our eternal salvation. Peter describes this as "...*an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you...*" (1:1:4 NKJV). Our hope is not a dead hope, but one that reflects the living nature of Jesus who was raised from the dead.

In the face of trials, christians need to remember what is important "...*These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed...*" (1:1:7 NIV). We are purified by the trials of life, just as gold is purified by melting it in a furnace. Whilst gold

is regarded highly by the world, it is temporal and of no value compared to the permanency of our eternal salvation. Our trials will test and refine our faith, and we must not give up our eternal salvation because of the temporal and relatively short trials.

God's Eternal Plan

Peter leads us back to the sacrifice of Christ. The Jews could not conceive of a Messiah who would die and be killed, and even the Prophets could not understand how it would be fulfilled. "...Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow..." (1:1:10-11 NIV). We are privileged as Christians, as we are the recipients of God's eternal plan "...things which angels desire to look into..." (1:1:12 NKJV).

A Call to Action

Peter calls for action and response. They were about to face persecution, and needed to prepare themselves mentally to deal with it. Our true strength of character comes from knowing that our relationship with Jesus is secure, and we can rest secure on that assurance. The true show of our colours comes from the example of how we live our lives. Like our *true* colours, we have a *true* assurance. The cost of our redemption was high – which tells us a lot about the value that God places on us, that He was willing to pay such a great price (Jn 3:16). God's plan is revealed Jesus - salvation comes through Christ, and His sacrifice was the means to provide it!

Peter gets down to practical living, and he tells us *how* to do it. We need to show love towards one another as we demonstrate our love of God. The certainty of our faith comes from the certainty the God who provides it.

Study 3: Growing as Christians

The practicalities of Christian living starts with Christian growth "... Therefore, laying aside all malice, all guile, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby..." (1:2:1-2 NKJV). The first part of the growth process is to tear away our old habits – especially our worldly (fleshly) habits. He uses the term *laying aside* which has the idea of stripping them off like clothing and putting them aside.

We can see what must have been happening with the brethren, as they brought vicious attacks against their accusers, and tried to deceive them with subtlety, trying to catch them out. They were saying one thing, but then doing the very opposite in an attempt to deceive their enemies. They were envious of the position of others, and in the face of persecution, they may well have been envious of those who had food when they themselves were dying of starvation. In addition, they were saying evil things about the people who were affecting them, which probably didn't help to calm the situation. This is contrary to how we ought to behave as Christians. In direct contrast, we need to be fed on – *the pure milk of the word* – so that we can gain strength and grow as Christians.

Jesus the Rock

In a play on words Peter portrays Jesus as a rock, and the Christians as living stones – smaller versions of the larger rock with the same characteristics. The same things that were happening to the Christians in the face of their trials were the very things that had happened to Christ, and leads to a strong sense of identity between the trials the brethren were facing, and Jesus' treatment. In spite of the treatment that He received, there was never any doubt on Jesus' or God's part of the special place that Jesus held. In spite of our situation, we need to remember that we are God's people and in a privileged position.

Whilst the analogy of a stone gives Christians an assurance, it gives a warning to those who do not believe in Him, as the disobedient stumble over the stone. In contrast to our former lives of living

under the power of Satan (ie darkness) and being alienated from God, when we became christians, we were enlightened, and filled with the true light of God.

Putting things into Practice

Peter gets back to the practicalities of christian living again “...*Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul...*” (1:2:11 NKJV). The recognition that this world is not our home should drive and motivate us. We are only on this earth for a short time, and our true home is in heaven for eternity. In facing persecution (from the Gentiles – probably the Romans under direction from Nero), we are to behave in such a way so that nothing can be said against us. However, this didn’t stop the persecution against Christ, as the Jews brought false and trumped up charges against Him. The *day of visitation* is a reference to the time when the persecution comes, rather than to the return of Christ.

Behaving in such a way means that we need to keep all of the laws of the land – as much as possible, without breaking God’s laws. By keeping the law, and showing proper respect to the authorities, there will be nothing to accuse us of, and nothing to punish us for.

Christ as our Example

Further instruction on christian behaviour follows, especially to those who were slaves. In the NT world, slaves were often just household servants who were bonded to a master, and sometimes even sold themselves for a period of time to “get ahead” in the world. Very often they would be treated well, but sometimes they were harshly treated. God’s instruction is to obey the masters even if they are treated harshly. Jesus’ example in the face of suffering is the model and pattern as to how we should behave in the face of unjust trials. Christ’s great example stems from the good shepherd, who lays down His life for the sheep (Jn 10:11). We are like dumb sheep. We became lost and didn’t know the way back to home and safety. But we have been redeemed and returned to the guidance of the great Shepherd.

Study 4: Wives – Submit to your Husbands

The responsibilities of christian wives is not an instruction to wives to behave as the slaves of their husbands (and even worse – for husbands to treat their wives as slaves). The is that the woman show proper respect to *their own husbands* by submitting voluntarily. Like submitting to the government and authorities (1:2:12-15), by doing such there will be no reason why the unbelieving husband can have anything bad to say about the christian wife. This may well result in the husband so admiring the conduct of his wife that he will turn to christianity himself.

Instructions for Husbands

Submission lies firstly with submission to God, and conforming ourselves to His will. He also requires the same kind of submission from husbands. The greatest blessings that husbands and wives can give each other is to help each other grow in God’s grace, and focus on the eternal life which lies ahead. As *sojourners and pilgrims*, we need to remember that “this world is not our home”, and we are only here to prepare us for eternity. We can either help or hinder one another on that journey.

Call to Righteous Living

The brethren needed to help and support each other through their struggles. Bearing in mind the friction that was already going on between them needed to be stopped (1:2:1-2), it was important that they showed proper respect for each other, and corrected their dysfunctional practices.

Suffering Persecution

Suffering and persecution is the key theme through the letter. Christ’s suffering is given as the example of how christians should react to persecution, although suffering is not inevitable.

Christians need to stand firm in the face of opposition, and not to turn against those who are doing evil towards them. If we do evil and suffer for it, we deserve what we get. But it is different if we suffer because we have done good. Peter has been driving at this theme right through the epistle. “...*It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil...*” (1:3:17 NIV). In the end, just as Christ overcame even death with power, might and authority, Christians are assured of our salvation because of Christ our example “...*who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand--with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him...*” (1:3:22 NIV).

Study 5: New Life in Christ

Christ's triumph over sin and death serves as an example for us. Enduring trials and temptations comes from the inward strength to endure – *the same mind* – as Christ had. The transformation of the new birth is a key, and is highlighted by our past lives “...*For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles...*” (1:4:3 NJKV). Peter makes the same point that Paul makes in Ephesians chapter 2 – *look at where you've come from: why would you want to go back there?* Such behaviour is typical of many things that we see going on in the world, and it's not a pretty picture “...*living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry...*” (1:4:3 NIV).

Worldly people may practice and enjoy these detestable behaviours, but Christians are to refrain (and distance themselves) from such. God's certain judgement can be seen from how He dealt with the Israelites when they sinned and turned away from Him. Worldly people might think that they are having a good time, but they will not be able to give an account that will withstand the scrutiny of the righteous judge!

The time is approaching when God's judgement against all people will come “...*But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers...*” (1:4:7 NJKV). We are assured that God will bring about justice in His own time, and that He will right the wrongs that have been done to His people. Our life on earth is short – and for the recipients of the letter it could well be shortened by the persecution. In the end, we should not be driven by concerns over when Christ will return, but we should make the most of the short time that we have on the earth, practice self-control in our lives, and be active in our prayers.

Putting our Faith into Practice

Peter gives very practical advice about living life as God would have us. “...*Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins...*” (1:4: NIV). The second behaviour he mentions is hospitality “...*Be hospitable to one another without grumbling...*” (1:4:9 NKJV). Having guests may not always be convenient, and may sometimes disturb the family arrangements. To some people the idea of inviting strangers into your house may feel uncomfortable. Yet God expects Christians to do this and go out of their way to help other Christians *without grumbling*. Christians should share with and serve one another. Showing hospitality is one thing, but there are other ways to serve our brethren, and we need to understand how we can use our gifts – *our talents* – for serving the Lord, and serving one another.

The fourth idea that Peter discusses is what we say. “...*If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God...*” (1:4:11 NJKV). Or as the NIV has it “...*he should do it as one speaking the very words of God...*”. We do not have the authority to speak on our own account – ie to “invent” the things that we say. Of course, Peter is discussing what we say in the church and in preaching the gospel. When we preach and teach the gospel, we have to teach the things that God has revealed. So, what we say must be as God says it, and not our opinions!

Consolation in the Face of Suffering

The time of suffering was approaching, which helps refine us as Christians, and we should not think it as a strange thing. In the end, we are assured that God will bring justice, both to us as we serve Him, and to those who mis-treat His people. As Christians we should have no doubt about what God will do with them in the final justice that will be brought about on the day of

judgement. The righteous God will bring justice to evil men – and we should have no doubt about God’s response – as He created us – the faithful Creator!

Study 6: Shepherding the Flock

It is one thing to have the instruction, but we need to have examples to follow. Peter strongly instructs the elders to guide the flock “...*The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder...*” (1:5:1 NJKV). Peter led by example, and the elders in the remote northern regions must also lead by example. Peter was not only an elder – and hence in the same position as those to whom he was instructing, but he was also a partaker – a joint heir – with those who were suffering. He could feel what they were feeling. As an eyewitness of Christ’s suffering he knew what Jesus went through, and he knew how Jesus reacted to the trials and sufferings.

The instructions to the elders are explicit, and the way in which the shepherding is to be carried out is also explicit “...*Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by constraint but willingly...*” (1:5:2 NJKV). The role is one of service – it is not the congregation serving the elders, but the elders serving the congregation. It requires the same kind of humility that a servant would offer to the King.

When the problems arise, the hirelings will flee, and such may very well occur amongst the brethren in Northern Asia Minor when the persecutions come, if the elders are not fully committed, or if they have improper motives.

Just as the elders (the leaders of the congregation) have responsibility to the people, so the congregation also has responsibility to the elders. We need to ensure that our actions do not cause our leaders to be deprived of missing out on their eternal reward in heaven.

Submission and Humility

The idea of submission has permeated the letter, but there were problems that needed to be corrected, and importantly, they needed to bond with one another. Humility comes from submission – by submitting ourselves to God first, and to our fellow brethren. The reward of our humble attitude and manner of life comes from God, who will bring justice at the final judgement. In the midst of the coming sufferings and persecution, Peter admonishes the brethren to *cast all your anxiety on Him*. With the difficulties that lay ahead, the brethren did not need to be concerned and anxious. Whilst the physical safety of christians is not assured (Lk 12:4-5), our spiritual assurance can never be taken away (which is not to say that we cannot give it up).

Therefore, Watch

We are assured of our spiritual inheritance, but we must be watchful and alert. Whilst we may be attacked physically, what we need to be most concerned about are the spiritual attacks. The description of Satan is strong! *He is walking around like a roaring lion*.

We are not alone in the struggle, and it is faced by every christian everywhere. Knowing that we have multitudes of brethren on the other side of the world gives us a great sense of comfort that *we are not alone*. Especially when we know that they are facing the same struggles that we are facing. Whilst persecutions may take place, we know that through Jesus we will reap the victory.

Final Greetings

The letter was dictated by Peter, but was penned by Silas. His purpose in writing the letter was to encourage the brethren to be faithful in the face of the trials that were before them “...*encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it...*” (1:5:12 NIV).

Study 7: Our Relationship with God

The letter is addressed to the same group as the first letter – those in northern Asia Minor. We have been made right (justified) by Christ's sacrifice, and because of that we have obtained the common faith of all of Christ's followers.

We have been blessed by having been brought back into a relationship with God, through Jesus' sacrifice. Through the example of His perfect life, we have wonderful examples of how we ought to behave in this world. God ensures that we are complete – we have nothing lacking! We have everything that we need, although that does not mean that we will have everything that we want! God's prime concern is our spiritual lives, that we are fully equipped to live godly lives for Him.

Verse 2:1:4 is a pivotal verse in the letter. God has blessed us, and we can participate in God's divine nature, which is another way of saying that Christ's work of reconciliation is complete.

Growing as Christians

Peter builds a line of argument: We have been rescued from sin, have knowledge of God by Jesus, and we have been blessed as God's heirs. The chain of thought starts with *faith*, and ends with *love*. The idea of *adding to our faith* brings with it the requirement for action – as Peter says, we need to *make every effort* to do it!

The application of the virtues is given “...*For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ...*” (2:1:8 NIV). Not only must we to have these qualities, but we must continue to grow in them – *in increasing measure*. We need to be diligent in our christian faith, and to continue to grow in the christian virtues – and if we do, then our eternal security is assured.

Peter's Exhortation to the Brethren

The epistle is a kind of farewell letter from Peter, and he wants the brethren to carefully consider their situation. He recognises that the time of his death is near, and another purpose in writing the letter is to help the brethren to remain faithful, and to continue growing in the christian graces.

The Basis of Belief

We can be assured of the things that Peter wrote, because they are based on solid evidence “... *We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty...*” (2:1:16 NIV). The apostles were eyewitnesses of Jesus. They were with Him for three years, they saw His suffering and death, they saw His resurrection, and they saw His ascension.

The certainty of the account is also given by the Old Testament prophets, which were fulfilled hundreds of years later in Christ. The prophecies were not made up by men, and they were attested as being true by their fulfilment “...*Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. ²¹ For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit...*” (2:1:20-21 NIV). The interpretation of scripture must be the one which the Holy Spirit intended it to be. We cannot individually “interpret” the scripture to mean whatever we think it means to us. Rather, we need to study to understand what God's original intention for the message was, and then (and only then) can we apply those principles to our lives and present situation.

Study 8: False Teachers

Prophecy and scripture are the domain of God, and not of men. False teachers were predicted in many places (such as Acts 20:29-30), and much of the New Testament writings carry warnings against and rebuttal of the false teachers.

These false teachers “...*secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them...*” (2:2:1 NKJV). They were not pure in their motives or their actions, and were deceptive in leading others away. Their actions would be *secretive*, and not clear and above board. As a result of their actions they would “...*bring on themselves swift destruction...*” (2:2:1 NKJV).

The methods of the false teachers are “...*In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up...*” (2:2:3 NIV). Their motivation was greed, not truth, and they were only exploiting those who heard and believed what they were saying.

God’s Judgement Against the False Teachers

Peter gives an assurance that God will bring righteous judgement against the false teachers, by giving three examples from the Old Testament:

1. The Angels who Sinned

2. The Ancient World

3. The Cities of Sodom and Gomorrah

These false teachers “...*are presumptuous, self-willed; they are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries...*” (2:2:10 NKJV), have respect for no-one, and show arrogance by their behaviour.

It only gets worse as Peter describes more of their behaviour “...*having eyes full of adultery that cannot cease from sin, beguiling unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children...*” (2:2:14 NKJV). Their practices are clearly sexually oriented, and they have no shame about what they are doing. With no respect for authority (2:2:10) they openly have gone out – *trained themselves* – to indulge in such practices because of covetousness.

As a further description, “...*These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, to whom the gloom of darkness is reserved forever...*” (2:2:17 NKJV). They are all promise, but deliver nothing. Whilst promising “freedom” and “liberty”, what they are actually selling is slavery to sin, and the result is (spiritual) death (Rom 6:23). Those who entered the delusion (both the false teachers and those who they entice away) were Christians (2:2:1) who fall – or have fallen – away.

Study 9: The Certainty of the Lord’s Return

The reason for both the first and second letters is given “...*in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder...*” (2:3:1 NKJV). We need to go back to two things:

- 1. The words of the (Old Testament) Prophets**, which foretold of the coming Messiah, and
- 2. The commandment of the apostles**, which shows that the things that they spoke were authoritative, and are to be obeyed.

The Last Days

The first and primary thing that we need to remember is “...*knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, 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 creation”...*” (2:3:3-4 NKJV).

In the first century, people expected that He would return soon. They had heard how He had promised to return, but thirty years later they still had not seen it. Many became sceptical and began to question the validity of the claims of His return. They began to scoff at the claims, and today, around 2,000 years later, still there are many who scoff at Jesus’ claims.

The Evidence for Jesus Return

The claims (and rejection) by these scoffers is not based on evidence. On the contrary, they have actually ignored the evidence. The first piece of evidence is the flood, which is willingly ignored, as people do not want to accept the *consequences* of it.

The same power that brought destruction of the world by water, shall also bring destruction of the world by fire. Whilst the water destroyed the people but allowed the creation to regenerate, the fire will destroy not only the people but also the earth.

Whilst the scoffers remark that the Lord must have forgotten to return, God does not count time as we do. In all of this, the slowness of God's return is not because He is lazy or that He has forgotten, but rather because He wants to give mankind time to repent. His patience is directed to us! To the Christians suffering persecution in the back-blocks of the Roman Empire, who were *strangers, pilgrims, and sojourners* on the earth, the assurance is that God has not forgotten His people! In fact, He is waiting so that He might redeem even more people!

But the Lord will return when it is least expected, and we need to live accordingly. Like the brethren in northern Asia Minor who were *pilgrims and sojourners*, so our life on earth is just temporary. Our permanent dwelling place is in heaven, and we need to use our time on earth to prepare for it. We ought not to trust in the riches of the world, but we need to rely on God in faith, and serve Him. The only true response we can have is to live holy and godly lives as we "...*look forward to the day of God and speed its coming...*" (2:3:12 NIV).

Recognition of Paul's Letters

Peter wrote in recognition of the letters that Paul had previously written. They must have been substantially complete and widely circulated by the time of Peter's letter for him to make the statement. The churches had widely recognised (and accepted) Paul's writings, which give credence to the things that they say. He regarded them as scripture – writing which had its origin with God, just as Paul himself did (1 Cor 14:37). Some people twist and distort the things that Paul wrote, and Peter describes them as *ignorant and unstable*. There was no doctrinal disagreement between Peter and Paul, and those people who disagree with what Paul had to say are the ignorant ones! Peter's opposition might have been trying to play off Paul against Peter.

Final Exhortation

In the final few words of the letter, Peter reminds the brethren "...*You therefore, beloved, since you know these things beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked...*" (2:3:17 NKJV). The exhortation is to remain faithful in spite of the false teachers who were trying to undermine them and lead them away.

The letter ends on a positive note with the instruction "...*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen...*" (2:3:18 NIV). We cannot stand still in our Christian lives, but we must move forwards, and grow. We all fall short of the perfect example of Christ, and we all need to strive to live our lives after His perfect example. Therefore, we all need to grow!