

Study 7: Introduction to 2nd Peter

Introduction

Like James, 1st & 2nd Peter are “general epistles” in the New Testament, because they are not written to a specific person (as were Timothy, Titus, and Philemon), or a specific church (Romans, Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians), or a specific group of churches (Galatians).

Acceptance of 2nd Peter as a part of the New Testament Canon is the most disputed of all of the disputed books. Yet, the book provides a great hope in proclaiming the certainty of the Lord’s return in the face of the sceptics of the time.

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The Author of the Letter

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Homework and preparation for next week:

Read the whole book in a single sitting, and a few days later read chapter 1 again.

Read the notes as a review of the study

Review the introduction and conclusion, (page 6 of the notes) and find the key words & thoughts. Put these together into a “story” to find the key things that Peter wants to tell us about the letter.

Notes for study 7: Introduction to 2nd Peter

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The Recipients of the Letter

Like the first letter, the second is general in its nature (one of the “general epistles”) although it is not addressed to a specific group. The first letter was addressed to “...*the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia...*” (1:1:1 NKJV), and Peter clearly has the same group in mind with the second letter, since he discusses how “...*I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure mind by way of reminder)...*” (2:3:1 NKJV).

The Author of the Letter

Like the first epistle, the writer claims to be “...*Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ...*” (2:1:1 NKJV). Whilst the first letter was scribed by Silas, the often time companion of Paul (1:5:12), with a short note at the end penned in Peter’s own hand (1:5:12-14), there is no such indication in the second letter. The letter is quite short, and may possibly have been penned by Peter himself.

Many scholars have denied Peter as the author, and regard the letter as a tribute to Peter that was written by someone else.

Bruce notes:

The most disputed of all the disputed books of the New Testament is probably 2 Peter, but the New Testament would be poorer without it: there are those who have seen the high-water mark of the Christian revelation in its statement that God’s purpose is that his people should ‘become partakers of the divine nature’ (2 Pet. 1:4).¹

Much of the “criticism” relates to the construction of the language, which is significantly different to the first epistle, and to that which Luke has recorded in Peter’s speeches. However, the differences can be easily understood, since Silas penned the first letter, and he may very well have corrected Peter’s poor Greek grammar, whereas Peter may well have personally written the second letter.

There are two tests which confirm the work as belonging to Peter – the internal evidence, and the external evidence:

Internal evidence for Peter’s authorship is strong. First and foremost he claims to be Simon Peter the apostle (2:1:1), and that he was “an eyewitness of His majesty” (2:1:16). He also claimed to be one who was present at the Transfiguration (2:1:17-18), where he makes comments which are not recorded in the gospels.

Further, he claims to be the same person who authored the first letter (2:3:1), and also as an apostle to speak with authority (2:3:2). He also claims that his writings were contemporary with Paul’s writings (2:3:15-16), and were to be regarded as scripture (2:3:16).

¹ Bruce F.F. “The Canon of Scripture” InterVarsity Press ISBN 0-8308-1258-X p. 251

For another writer to claim such things would hardly stand up as illustrated from the following: “Again it is said “it is almost inconceivable that a forger, writing to warn against false teachers, writing in the interest of truth, should have deliberately assumed a name and experience to which he had no claim” (Lumby)”²

External evidence for 2 Peter is weak, and no writer in the first two centuries quotes 2 Peter by name. Kelcy notes “However, there are words and phrases which may come from it and there are apparently allusions to it. Clement of Rome (A.D. 95) has words and phrases which in the New Testament are found only in 2 Peter (xi. 2, cf. 2 Peter 1:19; lix. 3, cf. 2 Peter 1:16; lxiii. 1 cf. 2 Peter 2:13; i. 2, cf. 2 Peter 1:17). Aristides (A.D. 130) has an expression which evidently comes from 2 Peter (*Apology* xvi; cf. 2 Peter 1:11; 2:2)...”³

Origen created a catalogue of Canonical books, including the epistles of Peter, around AD 200 (or only about 100 years after the death of the last apostle, John). Eusebius quotes from the list in his Ecclesiastical History (Book 6; Chapter 25), and says:

And Peter, on whom the Church of Christ is built, 'against which the gates of hell shall not prevail,' has left one acknowledged epistle; perhaps also a second, but this is doubtful.

So, whilst there is strong evidence for the authorship of the first epistle, Origen was not actually disputing the genuineness of 2 Peter, but rather quoting what others were saying about it. However, we should not overlook the fact that 2 Peter was recognised as canonical in the fourth century by both the Council of Hippo and the Council of Carthage, whereas the Epistle of Barnabas and First Clement were both rejected.

Date and Occasion of the Letter

Occasion:

The occasion of the letter is difficult to determine, and the best explanation is that Peter wanted the brethren to remain faithful after his death, despite the difficulties they were facing, and the denial of many concerning the faith.

Date:

Just as the authorship of 2 Peter is questioned, so too is the date. Some writers ascribe the letter as being written before 1 Peter. Much of the discussion arises from similarity between 2 Peter and Jude, and then the question of which letter came first. Added to this is discussion around the content and context of the letter regarding apostasy and Gnosticism. Part of this comes from the use of the future tense “...*even as there will be false teachers among you...*” (2:2:1 and other places). Clearly, at the time of Paul’s writings, these things were already occurring.

However, the similarities between writings should not be driven in an attempt to say that one writer “copied” or “followed an outline or theme” from another writer. This is especially so when both writers (in this case Peter and Jude) wrote general epistles addressing how Christians should live in response to the political and spiritual climate of the time; and also that both writers wrote what they did by inspiration from God.

Since Peter died around the same time as Paul, around May of AD 68 – about a month before Nero died, then the letter has to be written before that time. If it is dated after the first letter, then a time after AD 67 would seem likely.

Further to understanding the date, we would have to suppose that the letter was written from the same place as the first – “Babylon” which is a euphemistic reference to Rome. That Peter used Babylon as a euphemism for Rome, and that the first letter was written from Rome is settled as best we can conclude the matter, by Eusebius (Book 2, Chapter 15):

² Quoted from Cogdill, p.164

³ Kelcy, p. 109

And Peter makes mention of Mark in his first epistle which they say that he wrote in Rome itself, as is indicated by him, when he calls the city, by a figure, Babylon, as he does in the following words: "The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son."

So, in conclusion, the second letter is placed as having been written from Rome after the first letter (AD 66 or 67) and before Peter's execution in May AD 68. The flow of the letter also suggests that Peter is making his "farewell speech" "...knowing that I must shortly put off my tent as the Lord has shown me ... I will be careful to ensure that you have a reminder of these things after my decease..." (2:1:14-15).

The style of the letter

Peter states his purpose in writing both the first and second letters "...to stir up your pure minds by way of reminder..." (2:3:1). Running through the letter is the focus on Godly living in the face of those who deny the Lord's coming. As such it is intensely relevant to our present situation.

There are two other places in the letter where Peter further explains his purpose "...therefore I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know them and are established in the present truth..." (2:1:12); and "...but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ..." (2:3:18).

The letter forms a type of "farewell speech" from Peter, in which he gives instruction and encouragement to the brethren, when he himself is facing trials and persecution that would result in the end of his life.

Fee & Stuart⁴ note:

" ... Watch for the two (interlocking) concerns that drive 2 Peter from beginning to end: (1) the false teachers as such and (2) their denial of the second coming of Christ. You will find the description of them in chapter 2 especially vivid... "

Outline of the letter

The following outline is adapted from Fee & Stuart⁵

- 1:1-2 *Salutation,*
- 1:3-11 *Godliness and the Eternal Kingdom*
- 1:12-21 *Peter's Last Testament*
- 2:1-22 *Indictment of the False Teachers*
- 3:1-10 *False Teaching: Denial of the Lord's Coming*
- 3:11-18 *Exhortation and Conclusion*

⁴ Fee & Stuart, p. 408

⁵ Fee & Stuart, p. 409-410

Selected Bibliography

The following references will be used and quoted from during the studies. The full reference of the books are quoted here, and only their abbreviated title and page number will be quoted in the studies.

Cogdill

Cogdill, Roy E: “The New Testament: Book by Book – A 26 Lesson Outline series covering the entire New Testament”

Cogdill Foundation Publications, P.O. Box 403 Marion Ind. 46952

Eusebius

“The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus”

Baker Book House, Grand Rapids MI 49516

ISBN 0-8010-3306-3

Fee & Stuart

Gordon D Fee & Douglas Stuart: “How to Read the Bible Book by Book”

Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 49530

ISBN 0-310-21118-2

Kelcey

Kelcey, Ramond C: “The letters of Peter and Jude” The Living Word Commentary

R. B. Sweet Co.; Inc. Austin, Tx

ISBN 0-8344-0073-1

Schreiner

Schreiner, Thomas R: “The New American Commentary; 1,2 PETER, JUDE”

Broadman & Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN.

ISBN: 978-08054-0137-0

Key points – Introduction & Conclusion

By looking at the introduction and conclusion to the letter, we can derive some of the key thoughts that Peter wants to bring out to the readers – especially when they appear in both the introduction and the conclusion.

Take some time to circle the key thoughts in each section, and then link the common ones together. The keys to the introduction are Peter's use of *Therefore...* as a call to action, and the short conclusion with a plea for action. ... Quotation is taken from the NIV.

^{2PE 1:1} Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours:

^{2PE 1:2} Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

^{2PE 1:3} His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

^{2PE 1:5} For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. ⁸ 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. ⁹ But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

^{2PE 1:10} Therefore, my brothers,

^{2PE 3:17} Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. ¹⁸ But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.