

2 Peter

Authorship: “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: Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1-2).

Date: We can surmise from the letter itself that Peter anticipates his own death shortly, which would give us a date of about AD 67. Peter undoubtedly was writing from the city of Rome.

Unique Features: The last five New Testament Epistles, three of them containing only one brief chapter each, are linked together by their common concern with false teaching in the realm of Christian doctrine and ethics. Second Peter and Jude warn of those who scorn the authority of the Lord and His Word. Like false teachers in the Old Testament, they will taste the judgment of God coming upon them. The three letters ascribed to John, though they, like Hebrews, are anonymous, are written against the malignant influence of Gnosticism, which at this date (late first century) was beginning to show itself as a system of teaching. Professing to possess superior, mystic knowledge leading to salvation, their teaching set forth strange views of Christ and the nature of creation. John calls it “the spirit of antichrist” (1 John 4:1-3).

Background & Historical Situation: About three years after Peter wrote his first letter to the Christians in Asia Minor, he wrote again. Peter makes it clear in the letter that he is writing to the same group that received his first letter a few years earlier. Unlike his first letter where he addressed how they should respond to suffering from without, this second letter concerns itself exclusively with dangers from within the church. Instead of facing trials brought on by those hostile to Christianity, the churches of Asia Minor were now facing serious attack from those who seemed to be “friendly” to the faith. False teachers were infiltrating the churches and turning many from the pure sincere faith which they had begun. Peter also wants to inform his first readers how to handle those who have rejected the Lord and his truth. Second, Peter is a sobering reminder that the Christian faith always seems merely one generation from extinction! Knowing and guarding the truth are as important as seeking to live it.

Purpose: Peter wrote this second letter for three reasons, and conveniently devotes a chapter to each: (1) To urge Christian growth – Chapter One; (2) To identify false teaching – Chapter Two; (3) To have an “eye” towards Christ’s return – Chapter Three.

Theme: The key word of the epistle is “knowledge,” which in its various forms occurs twelve times (1:2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 16, 20; 2:20, 21; 3:3, 17, 18). In a letter which aims to combat false teaching, the knowledge of remembering certain things (1:12, 13; 3:1) and shows the danger of forgetting important truths (1:9; 3:8). Thus, throughout the letter, the teachings of the Word of God are represented as true and normative for the Christian life.

Key Passage: “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever! Amen.” (2 Peter 3:18).

Outline:

- I. Salutation (1:1-2)
- II. Concern for Sanctification (1:3-11)
- III. Confidence in Scripture (1:12-21)
- IV. Caution toward False Teachers (2:1-22)
 - A. Their Threat and Judgment (2:1-3)
 - B. God’s Judgment in the Past (2:4-10)
 - C. Their Character (2:10-16)
 - D. Their Empty Teaching (2:17-22)
- V. Constancy in Light of the Last Days (3:1-16)
- VI. Conclusion (3:17-18)

Sources:

Elwell, Walter A. and Robert W. Yarbrough. *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998).
Jensen, Irving L. *Simply Understanding the Bible*. (Minneapolis, MN: World Wide Publications, 1990).
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