

2 Peter: Chapter-by-Chapter

Introduction

Although Peter identifies himself as the author of this letter, there has been speculation that this letter was written after Peter's death. This is mostly due to the difference in style and subject matter from the first letter. Most scholars easily agree that Peter is the genuine author and that the differences can be attributed to Peter using a different scribe than Silvanus (1 Peter 5:12).

Though Peter's first letter was used to unify the early church, the second letter deals mostly with false teachings among Christians. Peter encourages the church to grow and patiently wait for the return of Christ.

Most historians date this letter around 65-68 AD, just prior to his execution in 68 AD. Peter makes it clear in this letter that he knows his time is short.

Chapter 1

V1-4

This letter starts with the traditional greeting, but it quickly blends into the body of the message. Verse 1 is the introduction of Peter and the address to fellow Christians while verse 2 starts the salutation to the recipients and uses that same greeting as a segue to Peter's message. Peter opens by calling himself a bondservant first and apostle second. This would not only emphasize the importance of being a servant first but put him on the same stature as the readers regardless of being an apostle.

In these opening verses, Peter again defines the virtues of Christianity and the great characteristics of God.

V5-7

These verses list a progression of Christian virtues as the grasping of one virtue leads to another and then another, culminating in love. This is a cumulative path of the Christian journey. All these traits should be found in every Christian.

- Faith
- Virtue
- Knowledge
- Self-control
- Perseverance
- Godliness
- Kindness
- Love

V8-12

Peter then goes on to tell the readers that if any of these traits are lacking that they may be backsliding. These traits are a measurement of our walk with Christ. Practicing these virtues is what reassures us and those around us that we are following Jesus. Peter mentions that it is good to be reminded of these things as repetition will form good habits. As Christians, it would be wise for us to review this list to see if we are lacking in any particular area.

V13-15

In these verses, Peter informs the readers that his own end is nearing. It's uncertain how Peter knew, but he must have been feeling some sort of pressure from the Roman persecutors around him. Peter is sending this letter to the church now so that these words will be with them when he is gone.

What does Peter mean when he says he must “put off my tent” in verse 14?

Some translations use “earthly dwelling” in place of “tent” but the latter is the more accurate translation. Peter considers his own body a temporary residence for his soul. His true, permanent home is in Heaven with Jesus.

V16-21

The closing of this chapter is a powerful statement concerning Peter's impending doom. The Romans, Jews, and most other religions and cultures tried to dismiss Christianity as some sort of myth. Yet, the apostles died for their beliefs. They proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus Christ to their own end. Peter is documenting for his readers his own eye-witness account of his walk with Jesus so that they know why he is willing to die for it. This is a bold statement not to be taken lightly. Martyrs don't die for a lie. The fact that so many Christians were willing to die for their beliefs is what helped validate those beliefs for others.

What does Peter mean in verse 19 about being “a light that shines in a dark place?”

There are at least two layers to this statement. The first is that Jesus brought light into a world filled with sin (darkness). When in darkness, a light can seem blinding, and we instinctively turn away. But the light is not what blinds us. The light reveals what's in the darkness. The second layer is that as Christians, we are to be a guiding light to others so that they can see the source of our own light, Jesus.

What does Peter mean when he mentions that prophecy is not of private interpretation in verse 20?

There was no shortage of supposed “priests” or “holy men” that twisted the interpretation of prophecies from the Old Testament to suit their own needs, including those that misinterpreted prophecies surrounding Jesus. Peter is reminding the early church to be wary of anyone claiming to know the meanings of prophecy but have no way of backing them up. God doesn't provide prophecies to surround Himself in mystery. He provides prophecies to reveal Himself to us.

Chapter 2

V1-3

This chapter is a direct continuation of the previous chapter and the discussion of false prophets. Peter calls out these false teachers as people who know the truth but deny the Lord at their own eternal expense. Verse 2 is used to remind Christians to always defer to God when in doubt. People, even fellow Christians with good intentions, can sometimes lead us in the wrong direction.

What is the motivation of false prophets?

Verse 3 touches on what drives false teachers with the use of the word “greed” or “covetousness.” The root cause of those that would lead people seeking truth astray is self-gratification. In keeping with Peter's first letter, this world is temporary and although false teachers may benefit from their deceit now, their eternity will be determined by God.

V4-11

Here, Peter begins to list previous examples of the judgement of God, going back to Genesis.

- The judgement of fallen angels
- The judgement of the world during the time of Noah
- The judgement of Sodom and Gomorrah while sparing Lot

It is interesting to note that verse 4 is the subject of much debate about the nature of angels. There are numerous theories concerning the origin and desire of angels that reference this verse. One theory poses that some angels may have sinned after the creation of man out of jealousy for God creating something in His own image closer than that of an angel. Regardless, the judgement of God is something to be feared and false prophets should be wary.

V12-16

This section is a harsh rebuke for false prophets, comparing them to livestock since they turn their back on the spiritual world. They are nothing more than cattle waiting to die. But these cattle look to take others with them to the slaughter and that makes them dangerous to the church. They seek to corrupt the church and take as many away as they can for their own selfish desires. Peter invokes the name of Ballam here who is known for being a prophet that led people away from God for his own gain.

V17-22

These teachers offer “water” to the church, but their water only satisfies immediate desires and does not sustain anyone. Their words could be compared to a drug addiction. The need for a “fix” is overwhelming but it is fleeting and only causes pain when it’s gone.

Peter goes on to warn false prophets and teachers that their fate is far worse than they can imagine. One commentator points out that with a greater knowledge of the truth there comes greater accountability.

This closing paragraph is yet another source of great debate among scholars about if someone can “lose” their salvation after being saved. Although there are many aspects of this debate, there is truly no definitive answer. One can even argue that focusing on this topic more so than the true message of this passage could cause some to be led astray and be a false teaching all on its own! The point that Peter is trying to make is that Christians should stay focused on God, not the world.

Chapter 3

V1-2

Peter begins his farewell with chapter 3, perhaps knowing that this may be his last communication with most of the church. It is believed that Peter was executed shortly after this letter was written, maybe even in as little as a few weeks time.

What is the importance of “being reminded” like Peter mentions in this passage?

Peter was well aware of the distractions the world had to offer. He wants the church to know staying grounded in the teachings of Jesus is the foundation for judging what is right or wrong. Our behavior as Christians should be measured by the bar set by Jesus, not the rest of the world.

Notice in verse 2 that Peter mentions both the prophets of the old covenant and the apostles of Jesus in the same breath. This would be a declaration of authority of the disciples that Jesus told to go into the world and preach the good news. The church was to consider the apostles and the prophets as equals. The Pharisees would not take kindly to this.

V3-10

Peter follows up verse 2 by confirming that there will be those that doubt and scoff at the followers of Christ for believing that Jesus will return. After all, the Pharisees scoffed at the first coming of Jesus so much that they crucified Him for it. It almost makes sense in that regard that the second coming would take even longer to occur if for no other reason than to prove the faithful throughout the millennia right. The non-believers justify their own sinful actions by pointing out that Jesus hasn't returned so why do they need to behave as if He is here? Peter rebukes these willful sinners by reminding them that just because they weren't witnesses to the great flood of Noah, and just because they weren't there when Jesus appeared from the grave doesn't mean these things didn't happen. They *choose* not to believe.

God's patience is far greater than that of any human. Whenever Jesus returns, those that witness Him will truly believe. God is willing to wait in order to give as many of our lost souls a chance to repent as possible.

V11-13

Peter returns to the message of his first letter by reminding the church to be on their best behavior no matter the worldly circumstances they encounter. The heavenly and eternal reward is far better than any comfort they may find here. Peter also sets up a precursor to John's book of Revelation by stating that this physical realm will be consumed by fire upon Jesus' return.

Of all the "doctrine" that the Christian church gleans from the letters of Peter, this command to conduct ourselves in holiness and godliness in anticipation of Christ's return should be one of the prominent attitudes to practice. After 2000 years, the waiting seems to be never ending. But regardless of whether Christ returns in our lifetime or not, we should always act like He is coming back today!

What does Peter mean in verse 13 when he says we are looking forward to new heavens and a new earth?

This is not a new concept, nor is there lack of debate on the meaning behind this statement. Revelation 21:1 makes the same declaration of newness. It is interesting that Peter wrote this *before* the book of Revelation by more than 20 years. There are numerous theories concerning the exact meaning behind Peter's and John's statements, but no definitive answers.

V14-18

Peter closes his final letter with the desire for the church to remain diligent, patient, and wise in their decisions. Peter even mentions the teachings of Paul as authoritative. It is not known if Paul was still alive at the time of Peter's last letter as it is generally believed that Paul was executed between 64-68AD, roughly the same time as the writing of 2 Peter and Peter's own death. Peter admits that some scripture and teaching are hard to understand, but that does not make them any less true. Some concepts are more difficult to grasp than others for us as mere mortals. Regardless of their difficulty, Peter urges the church to study the teachings of Jesus and the apostles and hold true to them. This is his last command to the church.

References

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