

The New Testament, Book 22

II Peter

Peter's second epistle is, like the first, classified as a "general" (or "catholic") epistle because of its universal application; it is not addressed to a specific individual or congregation, but is entirely applicable to the Church at large. In this letter Peter tells us fascinating things about Lucifer's rebelling angels, the great flood of Noah, the last days (remarkable things that are revealed nowhere else in the New Testament), and about the concept of time in the mind of God. In the epistle he also endorses the letters of Paul as inspired Scripture.

The emphasis in Peter's 1st letter was the suffering of persecution, and preparation for it. The emphasis of this second and final letter to bear his name, however, is knowledge. The word first appears in his opening salutation; and he urges us to grow in it, in the very last verse of the last chapter. There are things that the people need to know in order to reject false teachings, and to understand the events of the End Times that will come. The words "know," and "knowledge," occur repeatedly in the epistle's three, relatively short, chapters.

There is a sense of urgency in this letter. The risen Christ has told Peter that his own death is soon to come, and there are things that he greatly wishes the Jewish believers to know. In this way, as final words to people whom Peter loves, his last words to the Jewish believers are similar to Paul's last words in II Timothy, the words of James in the final chapter of his one letter to the Church, the last words of Jude in his small epistle, and John's final words to the Church in Revelation.

In the closing words of those other books there is a finality; but in Peter's writing here there is also an urgency--an urgency to make clear the validity of the fundamental, foundational truth of what he and the other apostles have taught, and to prepare the believers for the perils that he knows are awaiting them.

A. Author. The author identifies himself in the first verse as "Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ."

***NOTE:** In the salutation of his first epistle, Peter identifies himself merely as "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ." Critics cite this difference in wording as evidence against Peter's authorship of this letter; however, it seems to me that an imposter, writing much later, would have been careful*

to make the second salutation exactly like the first one. If, on the other hand, it was Peter, simply writing from his overflowing heart, he would have taken no thought for such unimportant details.

External Evidence. Critical scholars generally reject Peter's authorship, ascribing it to an anonymous imposter, writing long after Peter's death. Arguing for their position is the fact that II Peter is definitely lacking in external, historical evidence for his being the author¹. Among other things, the epistle is not included in the Muratorian Canon (Fragment)². Eusebius acknowledged Peter's authorship, and said that it was "useful to many, [and] it was studiously read with the other Scriptures." Yet, he said, its acceptance as one of "the sacred books" was disputed. Papias, in writing of Matthew's writing of his gospel, wrote that Matthew used "proofs...from the epistle of Peter," suggesting that Peter wrote only one epistle³. Also, it was one of the last books to be adopted into the inspired canon of Scripture.

Internal Evidence. On the other hand, however, the internal evidence for Peter's authorship is strong. He speaks of being told by Jesus of his own coming martyrdom, and includes himself as one of the "eyewitnesses of his majesty" in the Transfiguration. He refers to his first letter saying, "This second epistle, beloved...," and he speaks of his familiarity with the letters of Paul, recognizing them as inspired⁴. Furthermore, Jude seems to be referring to II Peter 3:3 in verses 17-18 of his small epistle⁵. Concerning Papias, his year of birth is unknown, but is generally believed to be ca 40-60 AD. He was a disciple of John and, at the time of his writing, Peter may not yet have written his second epistle, or Papias may not yet have seen it.

Conclusion. The arguments for and against the inclusion of II Peter in the inspired canon would fill a small library, and we shall definitely not enter into them any farther here.

It seems to me, however, that there can be little doubt that Simon Peter, the great apostle, one of three witnesses to the Transfiguration, and one of the Lord's three closest friends, was the author of this second epistle that bears his name.

The fact is that the Apostolic Fathers **did** include II Peter in the Canon; and, when you read his words, I think that you will feel their vitality, marvel

¹ Merrill Unger has written that II Peter "has less historical support of its genuineness than any other NT book"; yet he was convinced of Peter's authorship, and of the epistle's validity for inclusion in the Canon.

² For the importance of this document, see the next-to-last article in "Introduction to the New Testament."

³ ANF Vol 1, Fragments of Papias, VI, p 155.

⁴ II Pet 1:14 (John 21:18-19), 16-18; 3:1, 14-16.

⁵ Theodor Zahn, respected German scholar and eminent authority on the N T Canon, said that careful study of Jude alone gives adequate evidence of the validity and canonical authenticity of II Peter.

at their heavenly vantage point, and that they will shimmer with the aching sincerity and urgency in his heart.

B. Place and Date. II Peter was probably written not long after I Peter, ca 65 AD, and probably from the same place (“Babylon”). For a refresher on the conflict of opinions concerning the place of writing see “**B. Place and Date**” in the study guide to I Peter.

C. Theme. The theme of II Peter is knowledge⁶. Peter sees the need to prepare the believers in Asia Minor for false teachers who will arise. There are also fascinating revelations about the promises of God, the inspiration of scripture, the coming end times, and the necessity for remaining faithful to the end; but the theme is preparatory knowledge.

D. Highlights. Highlights in II Peter include the following:

1. An Interesting Salutation. (1:1)

In the salutation, Peter introduces himself in an interesting way. He identifies himself first as a servant (in Greek, *duolos*, “a slave or bondservant”); then he adds that he is also “an apostle” of Jesus Christ⁷. His emphasis, as always, is not on his exalted position in the Church, but on his humble, submissive position as a bondservant of his Lord. We would all do well to emulate the humility of the great apostle in this way.

2. “Exceeding Great and Precious Promises.” (1:2-4)

He says that the Lord, through his divine power, has given us all things necessary for life and godliness, through our relationship with Him; we need nothing more than what He has given us. And, to this end, He has given us exceedingly great and precious promises so that, by these promises, we might become partakers of his own Divine Nature. In this way we can become increasingly like Him, having been rescued by Him from the lustful, selfish corruption that is in the world around us. Although we all must discipline ourselves in Bible study, prayer and walking out our lives as Christians, it is by his great and precious promises that we gradually become more like Him.

3. Make Your Calling and Election Sure. (1:5-12)

As beneficiaries of those great and precious promises, it is vital that we continue to grow spiritually. We must pursue knowledge, understanding, and fruitful lives as Christians. We should make every effort to grow in faith, virtue, scriptural knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and the selfless love that is the very essence of the nature

⁶ Mrs. Sierwert, in her Amplified Bible, states that the words “know” and “knowledge” occur “more than 16 times.”

⁷ See also 3:1-2.

of God⁸. If we diligently do these things, we will not be lazy and unfruitful; however, if we fail to live this way, we can become spiritually blind, even forgetting how we were once purged and cleansed from our sins⁹. In view of all this, says Peter, we should pursue this way of life with diligence, in order to make our calling and election sure¹⁰. And, he reminds us, if we do these things, we shall never fall from the position to which He has called us, and where He has placed us.

***NOTE:** This point has been made before in our journey through the Bible, but it is worthy of repetition. One way to look at the Christian life is to think of it as a drive up a long mountain slope in a car with plenty of power, but no brakes or other way to stop. As long as we continue to drive upward, we go higher and higher, the air becomes increasingly clean and healthy, and the view becomes more and more vast and clear. All goes increasingly well as long as we continue to go forward. However, if we reach a point at which we are satisfied with where we are, with the view we have and the height we have reached, and we stop, we don't remain at the place where we stop. Instead, we begin to roll backward, down the slope, slowly at first, then with increasing speed, back down into the air that is not so clean and the view that is more narrow and unclear.*

The darkness is always there, patiently waiting for us, back at the bottom of the mountain, hoping that we will become satisfied and stop in our climb. We must not do that.

4. No Cunningly Devised Fables. (1:13-18)

The Lord Jesus has revealed to Peter the nearness of his coming martyrdom, and he wants to make some vitally important matters clear, so that, after his death, there will be no lack of clarity concerning them¹¹. For one thing, he eloquently states that what he and the other apostles have declared and taught are not cunningly devised fables, not clever--but--false stories, to deceive the disciples. No, he reminds us, he and the other original apostles were eyewitnesses of the life and ministry of Jesus. And, he reminds them, he, James and John were eyewitness of the Transfiguration, where they actually saw Moses and Elijah, and heard the

⁸ I John 4:7-8.

⁹ James 1:22-25.

¹⁰ After all, the word "disciple" means one who is under discipline, living a disciplined life. Even a disciplined life can be overdone, becoming slavish and legalistic, missing the spirit of it all; but laziness, carelessness and indifference don't work.

¹¹ II Corinthians 5:4.

very voice of God the Father, declaring his pleasure with his divine Son. Nothing could be more valid--straight from the source--from eyewitnesses.

NOTE: It is not known whether the revelation from Jesus of which Peter speaks in v 14, concerning his approaching martyrdom, refers to what the resurrected Jesus said to him in John 21:18 (after asking Peter three times if he loved Him), or if he is referring to a more recent revelation. The wording and the context seem to argue for a second, recent revelation.

5. Divine Inspiration of Scripture. (1:19-21)

Continuing on the subject of the validity of the redemption message, Peter declares, in three eloquent verses, the unequivocal reality of the divine inspiration of Scripture¹². He proclaims that we (Christians) have a sure declaration of prophecy, one that is not even to be compared with the fables of other philosophies or religions, and that we will be well advised to feed on, and follow, the revelations that we have from the Lord, through his eyewitnesses. These divinely inspired truths are like brilliant light, shining in a dark and murky world; and they will be our true source of light until the Bright and Morning Star rises, in finality, in our hearts¹³.

And, at all times, he says to us, we must remember that this Word, this inspired record that we call Holy Scripture, is not the creation of man; instead, he plainly declares, holy men who have gone before us wrote as they were moved, guided, and inspired by the very Holy Spirit of God¹⁴.

NOTE: I hasten to admit that am not sure what Peter means here in v 19, by "until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts." The wording sounds like he is speaking of the new birth--regeneration--redemption; and yet he is writing to believers, to Jewish Christians, and not to the unredeemed. The Greek word rendered "day star" is "phosphoros"; Vine's expansion on the word supports this interpretation, calling its meaning here "the arising of the light of Christ as the Personal fulfillment in the hearts of believers...¹⁵."

I do think that there can be no mistaking that here, when Peter says "day star," he is speaking of the risen, glorified Christ¹⁶. The promise of "the morning star" to an un-named over-comer (actually, to all such over-comers) at Thyatira in Rev 2: 26-28 supports this interpretation. And the

¹² I Timothy 4:1-7.

¹³ In this regard, see Revelation 22:16.

¹⁴ II Timothy 3:16.

¹⁵ Vine, W.E.: "An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words," Vol I, Day-Star, p 272.

¹⁶ Mrs. Siewert, in her Amplified Bible, agrees; she expresses and capitalizes the appellation as "Morning Star."

Lord's self-identification as the "bright and morning star" in Rev 22:16 seems to confirm it.

Perhaps this rising of "the day star" in the hearts of the Jewish believers refers to fuller (or full) knowledge and understanding (enlightenment) concerning the things of God, which will come to us at the end of all things (if not sooner). For now, however, as Paul has told us, we see things as in an imperfect, distorted mirror or glass¹⁷.

6. A Dire Warning about False Teachers and Turning Back. (2:1-3)

Referring back to the last three verses of Chapt 1, Peter tells us that even those prophets of old, the ones who gave us that "sure word of prophecy," had to deal with persuasive false teachers. It seems that, ever since Satan slithered into the Garden of Eden, distorting the truth and creating doubt in Eve with his subtle, "Yea, hath God [really] said...?," the people of God have been troubled with, and susceptible to, false, heretical teachings. Many, he says shall follow their wicked, pernicious ways, and that the pure truth of the Word of God--which we should be following--shall be maligned and defamed. These false teachers, he says, shall be motivated by greedy desire for money and material things, making merchandise of sincere, misled Christians. And, he says, these wicked deceivers shall not escape punishment for their wicked deeds.

***NOTE:** Anyone who has lived long enough to be using this Bible study guide has probably seen examples of such self-serving, false teachers. I recall one such deceiver, whose emphasis was on prosperity (his own), and who became very wealthy, who blasphemously declared, "It is not the love of money that is the root of all evil, **it is the lack** of money that is the root of all evil!" (emphasis his).*

7. Revelations of Cosmic Pre-History and Truth. (2:4-8)

Continuing with references to the last three verses in Chapter 1, and the opening verses of Chapter 2, Peter expands. He speaks of the angels of God "that sinned," saying that God did not spare them, but cast them in chains into everlasting darkness, there to await the final judgment¹⁸. By implication, he is saying that if God will punish angels who rebel against him, how can we expect to escape judgment if we do the same? Continuing along this line of thought he reminds us that only just Noah and seven members of his family escaped the destruction of the wicked human race in the Great Flood. Likewise, he reminds us of what befell the absolute,

¹⁷ I Corinthians 13:12.

¹⁸ See also in this regard Jude 6-7.

wanton, wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah. God is loving, patient, and merciful; but, we must remember, He does not wink at ongoing, rebellious sin, for He is also ultimately just.

NOTE: The phrase, “cast [them] down to hell” in v 4 is, in Greek, a single word (“tartaroo”); it is a verb, meaning “to consign to Tartarus¹⁹.” Here, in this terrible place, fallen angels are to be kept in chains and darkness, awaiting the final judgment. This reference to Tartarus is unique--used nowhere else in the NT. It is, by definition, a pit, or abyss, of darkness.

The identity of this group of fallen angels is not expressed or explained in the text; however, this uniqueness in the use of the word identifying their destination suggests a singular, special group, and not all of the fallen angels. This group is bound “in chains of darkness” awaiting final judgment. If this applied to all of the angelic spirits who joined in Satan’s rebellion and fall, we cannot explain then how there were still evil spirits at work in the OT period (e.g. Dan 10). Nor can we explain the many evil spirits dealt with still later, in the NT period, by Jesus, the disciples whom He sent out two-by-two, and by others, such as Philip and Paul. What, then, do we make of this? This passage appears to pertain to the fallen angels who impregnated “the daughters of men,” as described in Gen 6, producing giant offspring²⁰. For more on Hell (in the OT “Sheol” and in the NT “Hades”) see “What and Where Is Hell?” in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

8. The Terrible Future for Those Who Turn Away from the Lord. (2:9-22)

For the rest of Chapter 2, Peter expands on the terrible fate of those who turn away from the Lord, and especially those who turn away and then mislead others, causing them to commit the same terrible offense. In opening the topic (verse 9) he reminds us that, when temptations come, God can deliver us from committing the transgressions and fulfilling ungodly desires²¹. In the second half of that same verse he reminds us that He also knows how to keep the unjust and ungodly under punishment until the Day of Judgment and just condemnation.

From this simple--but--profound beginning, Peter goes on to describe the nature of such ungodly, rebellious, self-serving transgressors--those referred to in the second half of verse 9. They live in fleshly lust and uncleanness, they despise any authority over them, maligning and reviling those in

¹⁹ Note that the word “them” in v 4 is in italics, meaning that it is not in the Greek NT, but was added by the translators for clarity.

²⁰ Jude 5-9.

²¹ I Corinthians 10:13.

positions of authority. They speak evil of things they don't understand, and will perish as a result of their own corruption, for evil ultimately destroys the wicked²². They have "eyes full of adultery" causing them to keep sinning, but without satisfaction. They have conditioned themselves to do evil, and are children of a curse.

They have forsaken the way of righteousness; and, still worse, they lead others to do the same, promising them "freedom" but leading them into the same bondage of sin that possesses and enslaves the wicked, false, teachers.

In the final three verses of the chapter, just to be sure that we have not missed his point, Peter summarizes. If, he says, after having escaped the pollutions of the world through the full, personal, knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we become again entangled with, and overcome by, sin and sinful living, our punishment will be worse that it would have been had we never known the way of righteousness.

NOTES:

a. An example of the vivid and eloquent expression that is one of the virtues of the Authorized Version is the descriptive clause, "having eyes full of adultery," in v 14. It immediately creates in my mind a picture of those who are trapped in the wretched sin of pornography, the poison that is corrupting our culture (in fact, the world), including the Church. All about us, this venomous curse is creating mental and spiritual sickness, destroying lives, marriages, families and--increasingly--motivating the abuse and murder of the innocent, including children.

b. We must wonder about the meaning of v 21. Does it mean that if we have never heard the gospel message, and received Jesus as Savior and Lord, we will be given a free pass into Heaven? Of course not! John 14:6, and other passages of Scripture, make this perfectly clear. What, then, does it mean? Perhaps, as in the case of the special, and terrible, punishment in Tartarus for the fallen angels of v 4, there will be special, and terrible, punishment in the Day of Judgment for those who knew the Lord and his righteousness, but turned back and led others away from the Truth, to live out the lie.

9. Scoffers Will Come, Mocking the Truth. (3:1-4)

Referring to this epistle as his second such letter to the Church, Peter says that he wishes to remind us of the teachings of the holy prophets, of the Lord Jesus, and of his apostles. Sounding very much like Paul in I Timothy 4, and Jude in verses 17-18 of his small epistle, Peter reminds us that, in the

²² Psalm 34:21.

last days, scoffers and mockers will come, arrogantly rejecting and ridiculing the truth. They will reject and ridicule the promise of the Messiah, saying, in effect, “Yeah, we’ve heard all this before, but nothing ever changes; where is your evidence?” These enemies of truth and righteousness will reject the words of the holy prophets and the teachings of the apostles of the Lord Jesus because they choose to live for their own selfish desires.

10. Willful Ignorance of God’s Truth. (3:5-7)

These arrogant scoffers will close their eyes and ears to the truth, and they will do this willingly and willfully, rejecting and mocking the words of the apostles and prophets. They will reject God’s inspired record of creation, and the doom of the ungodly (does this sound familiar?). These enemies of faith and inspired revelation will be, in effect, willingly ignorant of the truth. They will close their minds to the truth because they choose to do so.

***NOTE:** The dominant school of thought today, concerning origins of the Universe, is definitely Darwinist evolution; and yet the scientific evidence does not support these theories. Why would men and women with brilliant minds continue to cling to belief in atheistic theories of origins of the Universe and the evolution of species, when the evidence overwhelmingly supports divine creation? Such men, believing themselves to be wise, become fools; and, thinking that they are free, are in fact slaves to sin, lost and undone, without a Redeemer.*

Of course, many accept the humanistic, conventional wisdom concerning origins and evolution because to do otherwise would greatly threaten their academic reputations and careers. They are not willing to lose the acceptance and praise of the dominant school of thought in this regard; they choose “intellectual respectability” over the evidence. It seems to me, however, that in the case of many such God-deniers, especially those most prominent in their fields of scientific study, it is because, in their humanistic, intellectual pride, they don’t want to believe that there is a Creator God. After all, if there is a God who created everything, He also has rules for our behavior. For such an unbeliever to admit this, even to himself, means that he can’t be his own god, doing what he pleases. Thus, as Peter puts it in v 5, they are “willingly ignorant” of the truth; they simply do not want to believe the truth.

11. God’s Concept of Time. (3:8)

In a single verse, Peter reveals something fundamental about time and, to my knowledge, it is a revelation found nowhere else in the Bible. He tells us that God does not calculate time as we do. As I have theorized before, it

seems to me that in God there is neither past nor future; rather, He exists in one enormous present, all known to, and presided over by, Him. Considering the totality of God's inspired revelation, I can see this; yet only here, I believe, in verse 8, are we given a vivid example of it. Peter tells us that, when we think in terms of time, we must be aware that in the mind of God a thousand years is but a day; vast amounts of time, as we think of time, are not at all vast to God. For One who has always existed, how can a thousand years be vast? To Him, even an age or eon (in Greek, *aion*) is but the twinkling of an eye.

12. God Wants None of Us to Be Lost. (3:9)

In the following verse, v 9, Peter again crystallizes a precious gem of foundational truth: it is God's will and desire that all of us would be redeemed and spend eternity with Him in the paradise of Heaven. This bit of truth may be seen in such other passages as Ezekiel 18 and Matthew 18:14, and it is also implied later here, in verse 15; but nowhere else is it expressed so succinctly and clearly as in this one verse.

13. Amazing Revelations of the End Times. (3:10-14)

In the next five verses, and without preamble or introduction, Peter tells us amazing things that will occur in the "day of the Lord." This expression, as used here, seems to refer to the period between the Second Advent, when Christ returns to make all things right, and the end of all things as we know them. He opens by telling us that these amazing events will occur without warning ("as a thief in the night"). This fact, that this event will occur without warning is found elsewhere²³. However, here He also tells us things that are not told clearly anywhere else in the Bible. He tells us that the heavens will pass away with great noise, the very elements that make up everything around us will burn up and melt; even the very earth, all that is on it or in it, and the atmosphere around it, will be burned up. It sounds like one great nuclear detonation with all that we know of the Earth and its atmosphere will disappear into a giant fireball! Now that he definitely has our undivided attention, Peter suggests in an understated way, that, in light of all this, we should strive to live lives that are pleasing to God.

***NOTE:** All that we can know for sure about the remarkable statements in vv 10-12 is what Peter has written, plus the basic principle that, in the Bible, fire is a means of cleansing. Concerning these three verses, however, I have a theory; it is only a theory, something that occurred to me many years*

²³ For example, I Thes 5:1-3 and Rev 16:15.

ago, and one that I have never known anyone else to suggest. It is as follows.

The Atom. *By no means am I an authority in such matters, and I will try to keep this simple, because that is the only way that I can think of it. When I was in graduate school, many years ago, our knowledge of the atom, with its nucleus, orbiting electrons, and sub-atomic particles within the nucleus, seemed relatively simple.*

Since that long-ago time, however, the knowledge of the structure and internal functioning of the atom, the interactions of its parts, and functional forces involved, has grown so vastly that, what once would have filled a very small book, would now fill a shelf full of very large books. New sub-atomic particles have been discovered, with their interactions and measurable forces. Theories concerning what is known have also, necessarily, evolved. Within the atom, distances are so small, and forces so powerful, that they have to be expressed in negative and positive exponents. In fact, current knowledge and theories of the atom are so complex as to stagger the mind; and, since neither you nor I needs to have his mind staggered, let me put my theory this way:

The Problem. *Ever since the basic structure of the atom was discovered, there has existed an unanswered question. Because the protons in the nucleus are all positively charged, and in terms of electromagnetic force they should repel each other, what is it that keeps every atom of every substance in the Universe from flying apart, creating a gigantic, universal explosion? The current knowledge is vast and amazing! And yet learned secular theories concerning the atom still rely, in final analysis, on a certain degree of assumption, and/or inference, to explain the inherent stability of the atom, i.e. what keeps it from flying apart.*

My Theory. *It seems to me that the atom, with those positively charged protons in the nucleus, struggling in a sense to get away from each other, is held together by God. In Col 1:16-17 we are reminded that God, in the Person of Jesus, the divine Son, created all things in Heaven and Earth, both visible and invisible, and by Him all things consist. And, in Hebr 1:3 we are told that God not only created all things, but is “upholding all things by the word of his power.” It is my curbstone opinion that what holds those struggling protons together against their nature is the power of the Word, the Logos--in other words, Christ Jesus. In an eloquent expansion of this thought, Frances Siewert expresses this as Christ “upholding and maintaining and guiding and propelling the Universe by his mighty Word of*

power²⁴.” And, when it is time for the end, i.e. time for the Earth and its atmosphere to be consumed in a cosmic, nuclear, fireball, Jesus will simply say, “You are released” (or words to that effect), and the conflagration will occur.

14. The Patience of God. (3:15-18)

Referring to the letters of Paul, which he affirms as inspired Scripture, Peter admonishes us with a reminder that it is only the patience of God, and his delaying of the final judgment that has made possible our redemption. Then, with one final warning about false teachings and the danger of being led astray, from our belief and trust in the Lord, and falling away (to our own destruction), he urges us to grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Finally, declaring glory to Him forever, Peter closes this, his final message to the Church.

²⁴ Siewert, Frances: “Amplified Bible,” Hebr 1:3.