

# EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE NEW TESTAMENT

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## The General Epistles II

### 1-2 Peter

As the church continued to grow and spread throughout the Mediterranean basin during the first century, God's people witnessed an increase in persecution and difficulty. Following Jesus was not easy. Peter wrote to bring encouragement to struggling believers, which also included important teaching and guidance. These theological and practical truths were intended to help the church remain faithful in a fallen world. Interestingly, the modern church is facing similar struggles to those ancient believers in the first century, meaning that Peter's words are just as relevant and timely today.

- a. **Authorship:** According to the opening verses, these letters were written by the apostle Peter. Historically, Peter was known as the lead disciple. His name is mentioned over 150 times in the New Testament. Peter and his brother Andrew were the first disciples that Jesus called into ministry. Matthew records, "*While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men'*" (Matt. 4:18-19). After Jesus selected the other ten disciples, it was clear that Peter, James, and John were included in Jesus' inner circle. These three disciples were privy to events, miracles, and discussions that the other disciples couldn't experience. However, one of the most defining moments in Peter's life came when he confessed to Jesus, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" Upon that confession, Jesus said, "*And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*" (Matt. 16:16-18). This moment was critical in church history. Jesus expressed that Peter's confession was the true gospel, the message that the future church would be built upon. However, as strong as Peter's faith seemed on that day, it would all come crashing down when Jesus was crucified. Peter would deny Jesus three times. But according to grace, after Jesus was raised from the dead, he restored Peter back into ministry, giving him the task of overseeing the Jerusalem Church (John 21:1-19). Following Christ's ascension and the Day of Pentecost, Peter and John began preaching among the Jews in Jerusalem. Even though they were persecuted, they continued winning more people to faith in Jesus. Paul mentioned that Peter was one of the "*pillars*" of the early church (Gal. 2:9). In Acts 10, God revealed to Peter in a vision that "*all meat is clean,*" which was a symbol indicating that the gospel was for both Jew and Gentile. While Acts doesn't tell us much more about Peter's ministry, we know from church history that he proclaimed the gospel to Jews and Gentiles for the rest of his life. However, Paul indicates that Peter's ministry was primarily aimed toward the Jewish people (Gal. 2:8). Peter would finally be martyred for his faith in the mid-AD 60s. Tradition states that he was crucified upside down because he didn't feel worthy to die in the same way as Jesus.
- b. **Date:** Most believe that Peter wrote the letters while imprisoned in Rome (i.e. "Babylon") in the early to mid-AD 60s.

c. **Audience:** Peter addresses his first letter to *"those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia"* (1:1). The description, *"elect exiles"* refers to those who have been chosen and saved by God's grace and those who are living in a place that's not their home. This description contains two meanings: (1) These were believers who were minorities in a foreign place, who had relocated to these distant regions (e.g., Pontus, Galatia, Asia, etc.) because of persecution in Israel; (2) These were believers who were minorities in the world, who were merely passing through on their way to heaven. With this identity in mind, it's clear that Peter is writing to believers who are facing *"social ostracism,"* who are being persecuted on multiple fronts (e.g., communities, relatives, hostile Jews, and family members") (Beale, 407-408). There is evidence that some were slaves who were being beaten by their masters (2:20). Others were *"suffering for righteousness sake"* (3:14), for *"good behavior in Christ"* (3:16), for *"doing good"* (3:17), and for those who are *"insulted for the name of Christ"* (4:14). So, as these believers were living counterculturally and suffering for Jesus, Peter wanted to give them encouragement and instruction. It's been noted that each paragraph in the letter begins with a command (Barclay, 457).

d. **Contents of 1 Peter**

- **Trials/Persecution:** Peter opens the letter by addressing the question of why these believers were suffering. He states, *"Though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ"* (1:6-7). Like James 1:2-4, Peter wants these believers to know that God is in control, and these trials are his design to strengthen and purify the church.
- **Holiness:** A major temptation for believers is to live like the fallen culture, especially when virtually everyone around them lives outside of God's will. So, Peter emphasizes holy living in 1:14, *"As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy'"* (1:14-16). He amplifies this message with a reminder that believers were paid for by the *"precious blood of Christ"* (1:19).
- **Submission to Authority:** One of the struggles of enduring persecution is how to respond to those who are in authority. To the surprise of some, Peter urges the church to *"be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.... Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor"* (2:13-14, 17).
- **Household Order:** When it comes to life in the home, Peter calls wives to *"be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the world, they may be won over by the world by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct"* (3:1-2). However, he admonishes husbands, *"Live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered"* (3:7). Clearly, there is a proper order and dignity given between husbands and wives in the home, and this too is often countercultural.

- **Suffering for Righteousness:** Returning to the theme of suffering, Peter encourages believers to remember how Jesus suffered and the joy of seeing him when he returns. He writes, *"But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you suffer for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory rests upon you"* (4:13-14).
- **Pastoral Instructions:** Finally, Peter gives instructions to elders (pastors), calling them to *"shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd, you will receive the unfading crown of glory"* (5:1-5).

#### e. Contents of 2 Peter

- **Genuine Conversion:** Peter was aware that a lack of holy living in the church could be the result of unregenerate members. Therefore, he states near the beginning, *"For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fail"* (1:9-10).
- **Biblical Authority:** In one of the most cited passages in the New Testament pertaining to the inspiration, authority, and inerrancy of Scripture, Peter describes how God has given us a *"prophetic word more fully confirmed"* (1:19). He reasons, *"No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit"* (1:20-21). It's interesting that Peter argues that Scripture carries more weight and authority than his own experience of seeing Jesus transfigured on the mountain! (1:16-19).
- **False Teachers:** With genuine conversion and biblical authority in place, Peter moves to attack the false teachers who are neither true followers of Jesus nor accurate messengers of God's truth. He explains, *"But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction"* (2:1). He continues by describing the fiery judgment awaiting them, *"For if God did not spare angels when they sinned but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment...making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly"* (2:6).
- **The Final Judgment:** Peter concludes by describing judgment day, when Jesus will return and bring judgment to unrepentant sinners. He states, *"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness..."* (3:10-11).

The letter of Jude has been described as “the most neglected book in the New Testament” (Kistemaker, 509). One of the difficulties of Jude is that he references apocryphal literature like 1 Enoch (Jude 14-15) and the Assumption of Moses (Jude 9). Adding to these obscure references, Jude’s shortness in length led some of the early churches to question whether it belonged in the New Testament canon. However, in the end, Jude was included in the New Testament, and it proves to be a short book with a powerful message. He calls for believers to “*contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints*” (Jude 3).

- a. **Authorship:** Jude opens the letter by describing himself as, “*Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James*” (1). Like the author of James, it appears that Jude is none other than the half-brother of Jesus. According to Matthew 13:55, Jesus had natural brothers by the names of James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas (or Jude). While very little is known about Jude from history, he was most likely a leader in the early church. Barton notes that Paul seems to imply that Jude and his wife were traveling missionaries, since he states, “*Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?*” (1 Cor. 9:5).
- b. **Date:** Determining the date the letter was written is difficult due to a lack of information about the author. However, some scholars believe that Peter borrowed from Jude while writing 2 Peter (multiple similarities), which is why the two books are often connected in commentaries. If Peter used Jude as a source, then Jude was written no later than the mid-AD 60’s.
- c. **Audience:** Like 2 Peter, Jude was writing to Jewish believers who were under the attack of false teachers. It appears that the church allowed such people to “*creep in*” and lead them astray. However, Jude doesn’t want the church to allow them to continue, but to stand up for God’s truth. Since Jude appeals to Old Testament personalities and events (Moses, Cain, Balaam, the Exodus, etc.), his audience must have had a strong Jewish heritage.
- d. **Contents**
  - **Antinomianism:** Based on the context, the false teachers were leading the people to disregard holiness and obedience to God’s Will. Jude described them as those “*who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ*” (4). Jude describes them with creative metaphors: “*hidden reefs,*” “*waterless clouds,*” “*fruitless trees,*” “*wild waves,*” and “*wandering stars*” (12-13).
  - **Judgement on Sin:** In order to deter these believers from following them, Jude reminds them of God’s judgment, which will be like that given to fallen angels, Sodom and Gomorrah, and Egypt.
  - **The Glory of Christ:** Jude refers to Jesus Christ six times, pleading with people to trust him and serve him. He concludes with a majestic doxology: “*Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen*” (24-25).