

LIVING AS A TRANSFORMED PEOPLE

Introduction to 2nd Peter

Historical Background

The book of second Peter was named after the apostle who wrote it, namely 'Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ', as stated in the opening words of the letter (2 Pet. 1:1). It is the second letter that the apostle Peter had written to the recipients (2 Pet. 3:1). It is likely that the first letter implied here was the book of 1 Peter preserved for us in our canonical bible, that Peter had written sometime earlier to groups of believers scattered in the northern regions of Asia Minor (see 1 Pet. 1:1). However, it is also possible that 2 Peter 3:1 is a reference to a letter of which we have no record. Unlike in the book of 1 Peter where specific regions were named, the recipients here were referred to in more general terms as 'those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ' (2 Pet. 1:1). Yet, far from being a general circular letter, the content of 2 Peter indicates that the apostle was writing to a specific community of believers, though unnamed, facing particular problems.

We know from this letter that Peter was writing towards the end of his life. He predicted his own impending death (2 Pet. 1:13-14) and he was concerned that the recipients should not forget the foundational teachings regarding matters of their faith after his departure (2 Pet. 1:15). Sensing that the fulfilment of the Lord's prophecy concerning his martyrdom is near (see also John 21:18-19), Peter wrote to give his final warning and admonition to a church facing grave dangers of going astray. As it is traditionally known that Peter was executed during the persecution under the Emperor Nero, this would put the likely date of this letter to around the mid-sixties AD, written from Rome where Peter is believed to have spent his last years.

Threats from Within

What were the dangers that the church of 2 Peter was facing? In addition to external persecution, which was prevalent at that time, the church was now encountering internal threats from within. False prophets and false teachers had arisen from within the church and were attempting to lead the Christians astray (2 Pet. 2:1ff). Who were these false prophets and teachers? And how were they endangering the church? Much of this epistle was written to address these questions.

Firstly, Peter made a distinction between these false prophets and teachers and the true apostles and prophets. Peter emphasized that the early apostles were eyewitnesses of Christ - His majesty, His transfiguration and the witness of the Father concerning His Son (2 Pet. 1:16-18). They were not propagators and proponents of 'cleverly devised myths', as charged by the opponents (2 Pet. 1:16). Instead, they were the true depository of God's prophetic word and they stand in the line of true prophets down the ages (2 Pet. 1:19-21). In contrast, the false prophets and teachers, unfaithful to Scripture and through their false words, were bringing in destructive heresies (2 Pet. 2:1-3). Not only were they heretical in their teachings, they were corrupting in their life-style. Peter called them greedy, lustful, despising authority, arrogant, wilful, irrational, blaspheming, ignorant, boastful, adulterous, sinful, deceptive etc. (2 Pet. 2:1-3; 10-16). Peter wrote to expose them and to warn of their sure judgment (2 Pet. 2:4-9).

The false teachers were wrong in the fundamentals of Christian doctrine. They denied the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 2:1) and rejected the second coming of the Lord with its accompanying judgment (2 Pet. 3:3-7). Peter called them 'scoffers' who doubted God's promises, denying the Second Coming (2 Pet. 3:3-4). Instead they advocated freedom and licentiousness (2 Pet. 2:18-20), negating the need for accountability to God and His judgment. Peter wrote to refute their wrong teachings. He put forth the reliability of his eye-witness accounts and pointed the believers to the power and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:16). In the midst of all the scoffing and mocking, they were reminded that 'the Lord is not slow to fulfil His promise as some count slowness'. They were to make no mistake that Jesus would indeed come again and His coming would be swift and His judgment all-encompassing (2 Pet. 3:8-10).

Concerned that the believers would be shaken and led astray by such erroneous teachings, Peter wrote to encourage the Christians to return to the basics of the faith and to not depart from them. They were reminded that they have escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desires (2 Pet. 1:4) and they were not to fall back to that (see also 2 Pet. 2:20-22). Instead of sinful living, they were called to godly living and increasing godly virtues that confirm their calling and election (2 Pet. 1:3-11). Instead of falling back, they were to grow in the knowledge of the Lord (2 Pet. 1:2, 3, 6, 8; 3:18). And in view of Christ's coming again and the judgment that is to come, they were called to live lives of holiness and godliness, even as they patiently await the 'new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells' (2 Pet. 3:11-13).

Relevance for Today

The book of 2 Peter speaks to us today as much as it did the first recipients. We too are living in a time of rising false teachings, especially those that ultimately downplay the final judgment and make room for weakening moral conduct. This may come in the form of sceptics and liberals that attack the accuracy and reliability of Scripture, denying the historicity and the truth of Jesus and rejecting His Second Coming. It may also come in the form of 'hyper grace' and moral relativity, which make light the seriousness of sin and shun speaking of its consequences.

The message of 2 Peter is a warning for us to hold on to the revealed truth of Scripture as handed down to us and not be swayed. It is also an exhortation for us to look forward with unwavering faith, to the sure coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, even as we live in the midst of 21st century scoffers and mockers aplenty. We can be assured that the Lord keeps His promises and things will not be as it is forever. There will be an end to the world as we know it, and the wicked will be judged and the godly rescued.

As we embark on the study of this book, may we continue to be transformed, growing in godliness and holiness. May we increase in our effectiveness and fruitfulness in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, as we live in a world desperately in need of Him. Let us remain on guard against those who would seek to lead us astray, staying faithful to Scripture, even as we look to the day of the Lord and for the new heavens and a new earth.

Outline of Study on 2 Peter

Living an Effective Life for Christ (2 Pet. 1:1-11)

Paying Attention to Scriptures (2 Pet. 1:12-21)

Guarding Against False Teachers (2 Pet 2:1-22)

Living in Light of Christ's Return (2 Pet 3:1-13)

Conclusion & Summary (2 Pet 3:14-18)

Source:

Frank Ely Gaebelein, *Hebrews – Revelation*. The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981)

Lane Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008).

Norman Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude*. The New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992).

Paul Gardner, *2 Peter & Jude*. Focus on the Bible (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1998).

