

PETER, SECOND EPISTLE OF. A composition of the post-apostolic period that claims to be the testament of the apostle Peter dispatched as a letter. It is included in the canonical NT.

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A. Introduction

The Epistle's words of encouragement, warning, and reminder, supposedly composed shortly before the apostle's death (1:12–15), were actually intended for Christians of a later generation beset by internal division and doubt concerning the Lord's final coming.

Because its addressees are unnamed (1:1), the letter has been included among the 7 "Catholic Epistles" (James, 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, Jude) whose destinations are less specific than the letters of Paul. Nevertheless, it provides a specific response to an urgent crisis. Gentile converts had begun to introduce novel doubts about theological [V 5, p 283](#) assumptions long taken for granted along with forms of behavior deviating seriously from ancient norms. The letter's double aim was to refute these "false teachers" (2:1), their theory and praxis, and to reinforce stability and commitment among the faithful through reminder of their divine gifts and calling.

Its rather unique blend of apocalyptic message and Hellenistic expression gives it a culturally catholic character. Old and new are combined as in a new arrangement of an old song: a jazz improvisation on "Rock of Ages" or, more appropriately, "Give Me That Old Time Religion." To contend effectively in the present and to prepare for the future, it is argued, requires a recalling of the past. Thus 2 Peter outlines an interim ethic for the present (1:5–11, 19; 3:11–18) which is framed and guided by lessons from the past (prophecy: 1:19–21; 3:2; world history: 2:4–10a, 15–16; 3:5–6; apostolic witness: 1:12–18; 3:1–4) and by the prospect of judgment and cosmic renewal in the future (3:7, 8–10). Basic to this ethic is the assurance of God's continual and consistent action in human affairs in past (1:3–4; 2:2–8; 3:5–6), present (1:20–21; 2:3, 9–10a; 3:8–9) and future (3:7, 10–12).

B. Reception and Importance

Together with 1 Peter and a large body of non-canonical Petrine literature (including the *Apocalypse of Peter*, *Gospel of Peter*, *Preaching of Peter*, *Acts of Peter*, and the pseudo-Petrine gnostic writings), 2 Peter illustrates the prominence attributed to the apostle Peter in orthodox and heterodox circles. Despite its Petrine pedigree, however, no NT writing was so poorly attested among the Church Fathers or received into the canon with greater hesitation than was 2 Peter. It left no certain early traces among the churches of Antioch, Asia Minor, Africa, or Rome. In Egypt, however, the *Apoc. Pet.* (ca. 135) made use of it while Origen (died ca. 253) is the first extant author to mention it by name (*Commentary on John* 5:3). Here too it was translated into Sahidic and Bohairic

versions and also included in P⁷² (ca. 350). Nevertheless doubts concerning its canonicity (Eus., *Hist. Eccl.* 3.3, 3.25) or at least its authenticity (Jer., *Epist.* 120.11; Erasmus, Luther, Calvin, and most modern scholars) have persisted down to modern times. For some contemporary commentators, particularly German Protestant exegetes (represented by the influential study of E. Kaesemann [1964]), it is the content of 2 Peter which raises serious theological problems. An identification of gospel with tradition and faith with doctrinal assent, it is claimed, and an ethic based on final retribution rather than on the christological kerygma must be seen as a loss of the authentic evangelical spirit of Paul as the Church embarked on the regrettable path of “early catholic” institutionalization.

Such a negative assessment, however, has not gone unchallenged (Green 1960; Bauckham *Jude, 2 Peter WBC*, 151–54) and more recent studies (Fornberg 1977; Neyrey 1980a, 1980b; Bauckham *Jude, 2 Peter WBC*; Elliott and Martin *James, 1–2 Peter/Jude ACNT*) have sought to provide a more comprehensive basis for appreciating the letter’s situation and strategy. 2 Peter remains an important NT document for both historical and theological reasons. It records the effort of Christianity in a transitional post-apostolic period to communicate effectively in a pluralistic cultural environment while at the same time remaining faithful to its apostolic heritage and underlying worldview.

C. Literary Genre and Pseudonymity

The epistolary salutation (1:1–2) and reference to its being a “second letter” (3:1) show that 2 Peter was dispatched as a letter. However, its formal character is determined primarily by 1:12–15 and the recurrent theme of prediction and reminder (2:1–3; 3:1–4, 17). Accordingly, this letter contains the “testament” or farewell address of the apostle Peter intended to forewarn and remind Christians living after his death.

2 Peter thus resembles other parting addresses or testaments contained in the NT (of Jesus: *Mark* 13 par.; *John* 13–17; of Paul: *Acts* 20:17–35; 2 Timothy), the OT (of Jacob: *Gen* 47:29–49:32; *Deuteronomy* 1–3; 28–31; of Joshua: *Joshua* 23–24; of Samuel: 1 *Samuel* 12), and especially in the OT Pseudepigrapha (*Testament of Abraham*, *Testament of Moses*, *Testament of Job*, and *the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*). Such testaments typically included notice of the speaker’s impending death, the prediction of “future” events, and exhortation regarding the appropriate behavior of the righteous. Generally pseudepigraphical, the testament was a literary form employed to address current issues as the anticipation or forecast of some venerable figure of the past and thereby secure for its teaching the authority antiquity confers.

This appears to have been the chief motive behind the “Petrine testament” of 2 Peter. The use of this literary convention here (1:1, 3–11, 12–15; 2:1–3a; 3:1–4, 11–14, 17), along with arguments based on language and style, sources used, problems addressed, and theological content, points to pseudonymous authorship and a date long after Peter’s death (Guthrie 1970: 820–48; Bauckham *2 Peter WBC*, 131–35, 158–62 for arguments for and against Petrine authorship; Metzger 1972 on the issues concerning canonical pseudepigrapha). Moreover, in the shift from future to present tense verbs (2:1–10a/10b–22; 3:2–4/5–18) “Peter’s” prediction is abandoned altogether and the real author speaks to his present situation.

Aside from his familiarity with Hellenistic rhetoric, Jewish and Christian apocalyptic traditions,

the Letter of Jude and unidentified letters of Paul, little can be said of 2 Peter's actual author. Considering his own identity less weighty than that of an apostle, he wrapped himself fully in Peter's mantle. Through the fiction of a Petrine testament and appeal to the apostle's eyewitness of Jesus' transfiguration (1:16–18; cf. [Mark 9:2–8 par.](#)), he attempted to combat powerful opponents and novel ideas with the authority conferred by apostolicity and earlier historical experience.

D. Sources

2 Peter is replete with anomalies (Elliott [ACNT](#), 120–26). Two of them concern its main source and the Hellenistic stylization of its Jewish-Christian apocalyptic message.

In many respects the letter is an eccentric NT writing, outside the mainstream of early Christian kerygmatic and catechetical tradition. The author knows of a collection of Pauline letters (3:15–16) but is concerned less with their evangelical content than with their distortions by the “ignorant.” Affinities with the Gospels are also few and vague, [V 5, p 284](#) deriving from oral rather than from literary sources (compare 1:14 and [John 21:18](#); 1:16–18 and [Mark 9:1\[2\]–8 par.](#); 2:20 and [Matt 12:45 = Luke 11:26](#); 3:4 and [Mark 9:1, 13:19](#); 3:10 and [Matt 24:43–44 = Luke 12:39–40](#)). Not once is the OT cited explicitly though the letter abounds with OT allusions (compare 1:19 and [Num 24:17](#); 2:4–5 and [Genesis 6–8](#); 2:6–8 and [Genesis 19](#); 2:15–16 and [Num 22:21–35](#); 2:22 and [Prov 26:22, Isa 66:3](#) [dog and sow]; 3:3 and [Isa 3:4 LXX](#), cf. [66:4](#); 3:5–6 and [Gen 1:6–8](#); 3:7, 10 and [Isa 66:15–16](#); 3:8 and [Ps 90\[89\]:4](#); 3:9, 12–14 and [Hab 2:3](#); 3:10–13 and [Isa 66:15–16, 22](#)). Among the OT Pseudepigrapha, 2 Peter shows several striking similarities with the Syriac apocalypse of 2 *Baruch* (text in [OTP 1: 615–52](#)) in both form (cf. the letter in chaps. 76–86) and content (delay of God's coming, divine forbearance, judgment of corruption). This late NT writing thus shows close ties with Jewish apocalyptic tradition in particular, affinities shared also by 1 and 2 *Clement* and *Hermas* (Bauckham [2 Peter WBC](#), 140).

The statement in [2 Pet 3:1](#) “This is now the second letter that I have written to you,” along with other similarities, would seem to suggest 1 Peter as a source (Boobyer 1959). The affinities, however, are minor and superficial and derive from common convention and tradition rather than from literary dependency. The letters are thoroughly different in form, language and style, sources used, social situation and issues addressed, and theological message (Mayor 1907: lxxviii–cv; Bauckham [2 Peter WBC](#), 285–87).

The continuation of [3:1](#) in vv 2–3, however, is virtually identical with vv 17–18 of the Epistle of Jude. Moreover, of the 25 vv of Jude no less than 19, in whole or in part, have parallels in 2 Peter. Of Jude's 460 word vocabulary almost one quarter (111) are found in 2 Peter. This extraordinary correspondence of vocabulary, phrasing, ideas, and sequence argues against the use of common oral tradition (as suggested by Reicke [The Epistles James, Peter, and Jude AB](#), 190) and for direct literary dependence. Earlier commentators (Bigg [Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude ICC²](#), 216–24; Luther, Spitta, Zahn) considered Jude an excerpt of 2 Peter. However, the broad current consensus is that the longer letter is clearly a later revision and expansion of the shorter one (Mayor 1907: i–lxvii, 1–15; Grundmann [Judas and der Zweite Brief des Petrus THKNT](#), 102–07; Fornberg 1977:33–59 for detailed comparisons). [2 Pet 2:1–18](#) reproduces [Jude 4–16](#) in the same general sequence; [3:2–3](#) echoes [Jude 17–18](#); [3:13–14, 18](#) reflect and modify [Jude 24–25, 1:5](#) and [12](#); and other parallels occur in [1:1–2 = Jude 1–2](#); [1:5 = Jude 3](#); [1:12 = Jude 5](#); [3:13–14, 18 = Jude 24–25](#).

Jude thus constituted the main source employed in 2 Peter and supplied the latter with both the material for the polemic of chap. 2 and the important theme of apostolic prediction and reminder.

2 Peter revised and expanded upon this material and set it within a larger framework of thought provided by chaps. 1 and 3. The OT examples from Jude 5–7 were arranged chronologically and references to Noah and Lot were added to balance the themes of destruction and deliverance (2 Pet 2:4–10a). Jude’s references to the apocryphal traditions regarding Michael and Enoch (vv 9, 14–15) were omitted. The “way” of truth (2:2) and righteousness (2:21; cf. 2:15) was stressed as a Christian moral norm. The disruptive Christians were identified as “false teachers” (2:1) and apostates (2:20–22). The substance of their deviant teaching was identified and refuted (1:16–21; 2:19; 3:4–7, 15–16). The theme of appropriate response to God’s benefactions and coming was developed (1:3–11, 3:8–18). And the whole of this expanded revision of Jude was presented as the testament and predictive warning of the apostle Peter (1:1, 12–15; 3:1–2).

E. Style and Structure

The letter’s vocabulary and style also distinguish it from other NT documents. Fifty-eight of its 402 word vocabulary (1,105 total words) are unique in the NT—the highest proportion in the NT (14.4 percent). This taste for obscure and grandiose language is matched by a style marked by excess rather than economy of expression. Many passages in the Greek original contain verbal repetitions and recurrent sounds (1:3–4, 5–7, 12–15, 17–18, 19–21; 2:1–3, 7–8, 13; 3:6, 9, 16), pairs of synonym (1:7, 10; 2:13; 3:14), and graceful rhythmic formulations (1:16, 17, 19–21; 2:4–9; 3:13). The opening section of the letter (1:3–11), as Danker (1978; 1982: 453–67) has shown, mimics the stereotyped diction and style of the omnipresent public inscriptions celebrating the virtues and deeds of benefactors and saviors.

Much of the content also has a pronounced Hellenistic hue: the conventional Greek virtues encouraged in 1:5–7; the notion of death as a “putting off of the bodily tent” (1:13–14); identification of the realm of the dead or “hell” (RSV, NEB) as “tartarus” (2:4); dispute about myths (1:16–18), prophecy (1:20–21), and involvement of the gods in human history and final judgment (3:3–7); interest in knowledge as a means of access to God (1:2, 3, 6, 8, 12; 2:20, 21; 3:3, 17, 18); salvation conceived as godliness (1:3), escape from corruption (1:4, 2:20), and participation in divine being (1:4); and the conception of God and/or Jesus Christ as Benefactor and Savior (1:1, 11; 2:20; 3:2, 18). The author is quite conversant with popular philosophies, the mystery religions, and especially with the beliefs and behavior of, as well as arguments directed against, rationalists and sceptics who disputed divine providence, life after death, and post-mortem retribution.

All these features indicate an author and audience at home in a pluralistic Hellenistic society (Fornberg 1977: 111–48). At the same time, the Jewish-Christian scripture and apocalyptic traditions employed in the letter’s argument reveal that this environment embraced Jewish-Christian as well as Greco-Roman cultures. In such environments the merging as well as clash of cultures was inevitable. 2 Peter was designed to communicate effectively across these cultures while at the same time contending for the ancient truth in the face of its novel distortion. With a diction that was exceptionally Hellenistic in its makeup, the letter formulates a message that was remarkably “primitive” and Jewish in its moral and apocalyptic orientation.

The Greek text and syntax of the letter is uncertain at several places and its meaning often

obscure. The many textual variants reflect early attempts to make sense of these obscurities (1:4, 10, 15; 2:1, 4, 6, 12–18, 21–22; 3:5, 7–12). Bauckham’s (2 Peter WBC) discussion is comprehensive and is based on the most recent edition of the Greek text (*NovTG*²⁶).

^{V 5, p 285} A coherent development of themes and line of argumentation and a consistency of terminology and style mark the integrity of the document as a whole. It is structured in three major sections. Following the address and salutation (1:1–2), a preamble establishes at the outset how the addressees are to respond to the divine gifts and promises to which they owe their Christian existence and future hope (1:3–11). Then, 1:12–3:13 comprises a double apostolic and prophetic reminder serving as the basis for the denunciation and refutation of sceptical false teachers. A concluding exhortation (3:14–18), paralleling 1:3–11, reaffirms the gifts and responsibilities of the faithful.

Within these major sections, the units 1:12–15; 16–21; 2:1–22; 3:1–7; 8–13 are marked off by internal content and/or inclusions (1:12–15 “remind”/“recall;” 2:1–22 (“way of truth, righteousness”) and by the introductory address, “beloved” (3:1, 8, 14). Linkwords (“knowledge,” 1:2, 3, 8; “borne,” 1:17, 18, 21; “prophecy,” 1:19–21, cf. 2:1; “ignore,” 3:5, 8; “forbearance,” 3:9, 15; “wait,” 3:13, 14), as well as frequent demonstratives (“these things,” 1:8, 9, 10, 12; 2:20; 3:11, 14) are used to relate and join smaller units of thought. A major inclusion is evident in the combination of “grace and knowledge of our God (Lord) and Savior Jesus Christ” in 1:2 and 3:18 (cf. also “stabilized” and “stability” in 1:12 and 3:17) which thereby frames the letter as a whole.

F. Situation

2 Peter was directed to a Christian community in which converts from paganism (2:20), assuming the mantle of teachers (2:1), had begun to challenge traditional Christian beliefs and norms of behavior. Their divisive factional views (“heresies,” RSV) had strong appeal apparently for members who had grown impatient with the delay of the Lord’s coming (*parousia*) and had begun to lose faith in its promise (3:4). In his *Anchor Bible* commentary on this letter, Reicke (pp. 160–61) imagined a different situation more political in character. He proposed that the troublemakers were greedy Christian leaders who had accepted bribes from Roman aristocrats intent on gathering support for a revolt against the Roman emperor Domitian († 81–96). There is no trace of these particulars in the text, however. Here the issue is described as an internal Christian problem. Covert introduction of alluring alien ideas was endangering the community’s cohesion and stability (2:1–3, 14, 18; cf. 1:10 and 3:17).

This situation is further clarified by other explicit and implicit indicators of the dissenters’ program. They “deny the Master who bought them” and “despise authority” (2:1, 10a). They deny the final “coming” (*parousia*) of God in judgment and cosmic renewal, and consider its promise empty (3:4, refuted in 3:5–10). On the other hand, they themselves promise “freedom” (2:19a, refuted in 2:19b–22), a deviant brand of freedom for self-indulgence probably gained through an idiosyncratic interpretation of Paul’s writings (3:15–16). As Neyrey (1980a; 1980b; followed by Bauckham 2 Peter WBC) has shown, the formula “not ... but” employed in 1:16a/16b–18, 1:20/21 and 2:3b/4–10a also identifies teaching refuted by the author. This included rejection of the Lord’s

²⁶ *Novum Testamentum Graece*, ed. E. Nestle and K. Aland. 26th ed. Stuttgart, 1979

previous coming (*parousia*) in power as a “myth,” individualistic and idiosyncratic interpretation of scripture (“prophecy”), and again denial of divine destruction and deliverance. In sum, these sceptics denied God’s past, present, and future involvement in the world and human affairs, divine communication through and control over prophecy, and divine judgment of either sinners or the righteous.

Consonant with this theoretical position, they flaunted a supposed freedom from judgment as a release from the commandment of the Lord (2:21, 3:2) and a license for self-indulgence (2:2, 10a, 13, 18), “pleasure” (2:13), and personal gain (2:3, 15–16). Over against the common good and the binding norms of the community they advocated pursuit of individual interests and rejections of social constraints.

The repeated stress in 2 Peter upon an authentic “knowledge” (1:2, 3, 5, 6, 8; 2:20; 3:17) as well as upon a correct understanding of the apostolic and prophetic tradition (1:16–21; 3:1–4, 15–16) has led many scholars to identify the opponents as Christian Gnostics (from the Greek *gnosis* meaning “knowledge”). However, interest in knowledge and wisdom as a means to perfection of salvation was by no means restricted to these heretical Christian groups of the 2d and later centuries. It was rather typical of the Hellenistic age in general, in secular as well as Jewish and Christian milieux.

Since the spread of Greek culture with the advance of Alexander’s armies (the 333 B.C.E.), numerous philosophical and religious movements had competed with one another over the nature and source of knowledge and the means it provided for discovering the nature and goal of life, the essence of human happiness, and the way to attain it. Beside the schools of Plato, Aristotle, the Cynics and Stoics, the school of Epicurus (the 341–270 B.C.E.) propounded views and practices with which the false teachers of 2 Peter seem to have much in common.

Among its basic tenets, this rationalistic and quasi-religious philosophy held that: knowledge derives from sense perception of the physical world, the “nature of things” (the title of a widely influential didactic poem by Lucretius, the 94–55 B.C.E.); this perception teaches that all matter is composed of atoms and eventually disintegrates; hence everything is mortal and there is no “life after death;” the gods are distant from and uninvolved in the affairs of this world; hence the notion of post-mortem retribution or divine punishment is absurd and the “myths” concerning the gods held by the general populace are ridiculous; mortals should not be motivated by fear of the gods, death, or divine judgment but by pursuit of “pleasure” (*hēdonē* in Greek, whence “hedonist”), i.e., the absence of pain and disturbance; such knowledge frees one from fear, guilt, superstition, and involvement in the affairs of social and political life.

The founder of this philosophy was generally honored for his wisdom and personal morality and was celebrated as a “savior.” Later adherents, however, came under severe censure for their “atheism” (rejection of the gods as popularly worshipped), their exclusiveness and especially for their alleged immoral conduct, whence the pejorative connotation of the related labels, “Epicurean” and “hedonist.” They were, in fact, compared to pigs wallowing in their self-serving passions. This practical philosophy flourished for half a millennium in the ancient world and attracted V 5, p 286 adherents from all social strata and walks of life (DeWitt 1954).

To the outsider as well as to many a Christian convert, Epicureanism and Christianity appeared

to have much in common, including their repudiation of popular religion, their sectarian exclusiveness, and their disengagement from political life. In the popular mind the two groups were closely associated and commonly subjected to the same condemnation. The description of those labeled “false teachers” in 2 Peter includes numerous traits typically associated with Epicureans. In addition to the substance of their teaching, the reference to their pursuit of “pleasure” (2:13) and their comparison with dogs and swine (2:22) is particularly striking. Most significantly, as Neyrey has shown (1980a; 1980b), the critique of the opponents’ teaching closely resembles the polemic regularly leveled by Jews and Gentiles alike against Epicureans and those thought tainted by Epicureanism such as the Sadducees. In all likelihood, the Christians censured in 2 Peter were perceived as persons under the influence of Epicurean thought seeking to attract other members of the community to their new amalgamation of Christian freedom and rationalistic scepticism.

G. Strategy

This serious erosion of the confidence and cohesion of the community as well as of its public reputation (2:1–3) called for a persuasive response. To combat this situation the author combined a rebuke and refutation of the sceptics with a reaffirmation of the faithful. The letter of Jude, conventional anti-Epicurean polemic, language and motifs of benefactor commemoration, apocalyptic tradition, and apostolic-prophetic testimony provided the models and substance of the argument.

To isolate and discredit the sceptics, a comprehensive contrast is drawn between their behavior and that of the faithful, their new and alien false teaching and the ancient prophetic and apostolic testimony verified by God. Those who scoff at the Lord’s coming are “false teachers” who exploit and entice with “false words” like the “false prophets” of old (2:1–3, 14–16). By contrast, you the faithful know the “truth” and its reliable source (1:12–21, 3:1–2; cf. 1:2–3, 5–8; 3:17–18). They are “ignorant” (3:16) like “irrational animals” (2:12, 22); they “forget” (1:9) and “ignore” (3:8) what they once knew (2:20–22). You should “not ignore” (3:8) but “remember” the testimonies (1:12–15, 3:1–2) and advance in all the gifts you have received from God (1:3–11, 3:14–18). They have followed Balaam’s “way” of error (2:15), whereas you adhere to the “way of truth and righteousness” (2:2, 21). They are “unstable” apostates who mislead others (2:2, 15, 20–22; 3:16); you must resist their efforts and remain “stable” (3:17; 1:10, 12). They distrust God’s “promise” (3:3–4; but their own “promise” of freedom is vacuous (2:17–19). However, the “promises” you have are reliable for they come from God (1:4; 3:9, 13). They are “ungodly,” “lawless men” (3:17; cf. 2:6, 8) seeking their own self-serving passions and interests (1:20, 2:2–3, 10–11, 13–14, 18); they are unholy “slaves of corruption” (2:19–20). But you have “escaped corruption” and “passion” and share in God’s holy nature (1:3–4; 3:11, 14). They, like the sinners of old, will be “condemned,” though they doubt God’s judgment (2:3, 4–10a; 3:4–7). but you can trust God’s coming. If, like righteous Noah and Lot of old, you remain faithful, you will be rescued (1:10–11, 3:11–18).

Accompanying this strategy of demarcation was an argument based on historical precedence and antiquity. To allay doubt in God’s present and future involvement in human judgment and cosmic renewal, the author recalled scriptural evidence and apostolic eyewitness testimony from the past. God’s creative and destructive action in the world is recorded in history (2:4–8; 3:5–6). This history establishes the certainty of his present and future involvement in human judgment and cosmic

renewal (2:9–10a, 12; 3:7, 8–13). As God spoke at creation (3:5), so he also spoke through the prophets and to his Son (1:16–21). This word and coming of God in the past is attested by the personal experience of the earliest of the apostles, Symeon Peter. This “coming in power,” already experienced in human history, is a model for, and basis for confidence in, the parousia to come at the end of time (3:1–11).

Over against the novel and alien vagaries of the false teachers, 2 Peter thus posed the older, venerable, and more probative testimony of prophetic and apostolic tradition. Over against their aberrant and divisive sense of freedom, he emphasized the unifying way of truth and righteousness and the holy commandment received from Jesus Christ. Over against scepticism concerning the future, he urged recollection of what the believers had already received and knew. “Entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ” would be theirs if they awaited the day of the Lord in patient confidence and grew in the gifts already granted.

2 Peter has been faulted for its lack of reference to the heart of the kerygma, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and its implications for Christian faith and conduct. The nature of the error confronted, however, concerned theological assumptions underlying that kerygma rather than the kerygma itself: the ancient Jewish and primitive Christian belief concerning divine providence and the exercise of divine justice. It was this previously unquestioned belief which converts from paganism had begun to challenge. Their scepticism focused not the person and role of Jesus but rather on the presence and participation of God in human history. In response, the author marshaled arguments and sources useful for the reaffirmation of this belief and the refutation of those who challenged it. Jude and anti-Epicurean polemic supplied the model and substance for the critique of the false teachers. Apocalyptic tradition likewise was used to reassert the universal scope of God’s reign and to stress the link between present, past and future, protology and eschatology. The fiction of a Petrine testament supplied the letter with apostolic credentials which were older and therefore superior to those of Paul and Jude, the author of 2 Peter’s chief source. Furthermore, Peter’s eyewitness of Jesus’ transfiguration, the foreshadowing of the future parousia in past time and space, countered the sceptics’ charge that the parousia of God (or the gods) was merely a fanciful “myth.” Finally, the testament form itself provided a means for depicting events of the present as already anticipated and addressed in an authoritative legacy from the past.

Linked to its theological eschatology of the endtime, 2 [V 5, p 287](#) Peter proposed an “interim ethics” for Christians awaiting the dawning of the final day of the Lord. Between Christian conversion and cosmic consummation believers were to grow in the gifts and their stability and salvation by resisting the seduction of Christian subversives who deviate from the prophetic and apostolic norms of truth; avoid the corruption of the world by leading holy, godly and peaceful lives in accord with the way of righteousness; and with patient confidence await the promised day of the Lord.

Despite its marginal status within the course of Christian theology, the concerns of this letter retain perennial significance. For when sceptics of any age question the rule of God in human history, the certainty of afterlife, Christ’s coming in power and judgment, and the implications of this for Christian morality, then this recollection of the ancient apostolic tradition assumes fresh urgency and vitality.

H. Origin, Destination, and Date

2 Peter contains only implicit information concerning its origin, destination, and date of composition. The letter's salutation (1:1–2) does not specify the geographical location of its intended audience. The situation, style, and content of the letter indicate that both author and audience resided in culturally pluralistic Hellenistic environments. Both addressees and false teachers are said to have “escaped from the world's corruption” (1:4, 2:20), a characterization which is more appropriate to gentile rather than Jewish converts. On the other hand, the frequent allusions to the Jewish scriptures, the occasional use of Semitic turns of phrase (2:1, 2, 12–14; 3:3), and the strong reliance on Jewish apocalyptic materials, suggest that the audience on the whole was familiar with and could be persuaded by tradition drawn from the Jewish-Christian heritage. The addressees were also assumed to have known of Paul and at least some of his letters (3:15–16), of a previous Petrine letter, and possibly of the letter of Jude (3:1–3).

The location of the audience could have been in any of the cosmopolitan centers of the Mediterranean world penetrated by Christianity such as Antioch in Syria, Alexandria in Egypt, Ephesus in Asia Minor, or Rome. However, the cumulative evidence argues most strongly for Asia Minor. Here pagan, Jewish, and Christian cultures coexisted and clashed, Epicureans had a firm foothold, Pauline letters were gathered, and another epistle of Peter was known. Egypt as a possible, though less likely, place of destination is suggested by the early use of 2 Peter in the Egyptian *Apocalypse of Peter* († ca. 135 C.E.) and its first explicit citation by Origen of Alexandria († 217–ca. 251).

Although the letter's place of origin is also unspecified, several indications point to Rome. This was the site of Peter's death and the location of the Petrine circle from which 1 Peter issued. The numerous affinities between 2 Peter and the clearly Roman documents of 1 and 2 Clement and the *Shepherd of Hermas* suggest dependence on a common Roman Christian tradition (Bauckham 2 Peter WBC, 145–51, 158–62). These documents, along with 1 Peter, also attest the pastoral concern of the Christian groups in Rome for the churches abroad.

The lower and upper limits of the letter's date of composition are established by its use of Jude († ca. 70–90) and its probable use by the author of the *Apocalypse of Peter* († ca. 135). This time frame also accords with its concerns, content, and retrospective perspective. The advanced Hellenistic spirit of the letter, the Christian divisions it describes, the delay of the parousia it must explain and the doubts it must dispel, its retrospective appeal to the legacy of an apostle no longer alive, the misuse of prophetic and Pauline writings it must correct, along with its relatively late attestation are all features which indicate that 2 Peter is, with great likelihood, the latest composition of the NT, written sometime in the first quarter of † the 2d century. Composed in the name of Peter who had long since died († ca. 65–67 C.E.), it nevertheless claims to preserve a testament which provides a formal link with the past and a guideline for present and future. (See also Chase HDB 3: 779–96; Fuchs and Reymond *La deuxième épître de Saint Pierre. La épître de Saint Jude* CNT 2/13b; Kelly *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude* HNTC; Schelkle *Die Petrusbriefe, Der Judasbrief* HTKNT; Schrage and Balz *Die “Katholischen” Briefe* NTD 10; Spicq *Les Epitres de Saint Pierre* SB.)

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