

Introduction to 2nd Peter¹

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Authorship, Authenticity, Canonicity

The authenticity of 2 Peter is attacked perhaps more than any other book in the New Testament canon. The prevailing view among critical scholars is that 2 Peter was written by someone other than Peter claiming to be Peter in the second century when such Pseudepigraphical writings were common. However, the arguments raised against 2 Peter's authenticity are answerable.

The *first* argument used to dismiss 2 Peter's authenticity is that the second century church fathers did not comment upon this letter. However, it is possible to interpret their silence as a position of neutrality rather than a position of opposition to the letter. Moreover, their silence could be attributed to the letter's latter date, brevity, limited distribution, and stylistic differences with 1 Peter. The reticence of these fathers could also be attributed to 2 Peter's preoccupation with angels and apocryphal allusions,² and that Peter's name was often used to authenticate Gnostic writings. It is also worth observing that 2 Peter was often neglected by the fathers since it had to compete with several other latter works claiming to be Petrine, such as the *Apocalypse of Peter*. Perhaps the early

¹ Material for this section was compiled from various sources, including Robert G. Gromacki, *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), 359-63; Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 476-81; Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude*, rev. ed., Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968; reprint, 1991), 13-39; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 811-42; Kenneth Gangel, "2 Peter," in *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor, 1983), 859-62; Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on 2 Peter," online: www.soniclight.com, accessed 18 January 2006, 1-2; Stanley Toussaint, "The Second Epistle of Peter," (unpublished class notes in BE 307B Hebrews, General Epistles, and Revelation, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2000), 1-3; Harold Hoehner, "New Testament Introduction and the Gospels 200/305," (unpublished class notes in NT 200/305 New Testament Introduction and the Gospels, Dallas Theological Seminary, Summer 2001), 38-47; Roy B. Zuck, *Introduction to 2 Peter*, Dallas Theological Seminary Class Notes (Dallas, TX: unpublished, no date), 1-2.

² The assumption that Peter was preoccupied with apocryphal allusions is based upon the idea that 2 Peter was dependent upon Jude. This assumption may not be true. See my Jude argument for a defense of Petrine priority.

church fathers failed to embrace 2 Peter because persecution prevented them from studying more fully the issues that troubled them about the work.

Despite the silence of the fathers, traces of 2 Peter have been found in various early works, such as Hermas (A.D. 120), 1 Clement (A.D. 95), 2 Clement (A.D. 150), *Didache*, *Apocalypse of Peter* (A.D. 200), Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 200), Aristides (A.D. 130), Valentinus (A.D. 130), and Hippolytus (A.D. 180). Second century apocryphal works such as the *Gospel of Truth* and the *Apocryphon of John* also quote the book. However, the most important early work citing 2 Peter is the Book of Jude.³

| 2 Peter | Jude |
|----------------|-------------|
| 1:5 | 3 |
| 2:1 | 4 |
| 2:4 | 6 |
| 2:6-7 | 7 |
| 2:10 | 8 |
| 2:11 | 9 |
| 2:12 | 10 |
| 2:13 | 12 |
| 2:15 | 11 |
| 2:15-17 | 12-13 |
| 2:18 | 16 |
| 3:2 | 17 |
| 3:3 | 18 |

Other later works accepted the canonicity of 2 Peter, such as the third century Bodmer Papyrus (P 72). Interestingly, the authenticity of 2 Peter was not denied by any known third century father. While they may have categorized the epistle as disputed, it was not categorized as spurious. Eusebius quoted Origen as saying that the work was disputed.⁴ Methodius and Firmilian seem to have embraced the authenticity of 2 Peter. Fourth century writers embracing the canonicity of 2

³ This argument assumes Petrine priority. For a defense of Petrine priority, see my Jude argument. This chart was taken from Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Messianic Jewish Epistles*, Ariel's Bible Commentary (Tustin, CA: Ariel, 2005), 390.

⁴ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.25.8.

Peter include Jerome, Athanasius, Augustine, and Ambrose. The book was also accepted at the councils of Laodicea (A.D. 372) and Carthage (A.D. 397). 2 Peter was generally recognized as authentic by the fourth century. Such universal recognition was accomplished with full recognition of the arguments against 2 Peter's authenticity.

The *second* argument used to dismiss 2 Peter's authenticity is the alleged contrasts between First and Second Peter. Differences supposedly exist in terms of style,⁵ vocabulary,⁶ level of informality, and use of the Old Testament. However, finding such differences often rests upon the subjectivity of the critic rather than objective fact. Furthermore, these differences might be attributable to different circumstances, purposes, and moods at the time of writing. One would expect Peter to communicate differently in his second letter since it represented his last will and testament. These differences might also be explained upon understanding that while Peter employed an amanuensis in his first letter (5:12), he either employed a different amanuensis or penned the second letter himself.

It should also be noted that any differences are outweighed by similarities between the two letters. For example, the salutations in both letters are nearly identical (1:2). Also, certain unique words are common to both letters. They include "precious" (1:1, 4; 1 Pet 1:7, 19; 2:6-7), "put off" or "putting away"(1:14; 1 Pet 3:21), "eyewitness" or "behold" (1:16; 1 Pet 2:12; 3:2), "supply" (1:5, 11; 1 Pet 4:11), "conversation" (2:7; 3:11; 1 Pet 1:15, 18; 2:12; 3:1-2, 16), "brotherly kindness" or "love of the brethren," (1:7; 1 Pet 1:22), "without spot and blameless" or "without blemish and without spot" (3:14; 1 Pet 1:19; 2:13), "virtue" (1:3; 1 Pet 2:9), and "has ceased from sin" (2:14; 1 Pet 4:1). Interestingly, First and Second Peter have 153 words in common, which is almost as many

⁵ While the Greek of 1 Peter seems polished, the Greek of 2 Peter is rough.

⁶ While 1 Peter makes use of the terms "holy," "conscience," and "hope," these terms are missing from 2 Peter.

as the 161 common words between First and Second Timothy. Moreover, common ideas are found in both letters such as the historicity of Noah and the Ark (2:5; 1 Pet 3:20), a high view of the Old Testament (1:19-21; 1 Pet 1:10-12), and an emphasis upon Christ's *Parousia* (2:9; 1 Pet 5:4).

Sometimes critics suggest that First and Second Peter were written by different writers since Christ's coming is described with the term *apokalupsis* in the first book and with the term *parousia* in the second book. However, this same difference can be found in between 1 Corinthians and 1 Thessalonians and yet no one suggests on this basis that different people wrote these books. Others note that the Christological themes prevalent in 1 Peter are absent in 2 Peter. Yet 2 Peter also exhibits a high Christology (1:17; 2:20; 3:18).

The *third* argument used to dismiss 2 Peter's authenticity is to note the common practice of pseudonymity in the Greco-Roman world. However, the church would never have accepted this practice as evidence by Paul's condemnation of it (2 Thess 2:2; 3:17) and the church's rejection of the Pseudepigraphical writings. The church believed in honesty. In fact, to argue that someone wrote 2 Peter other than Peter is to contradict the very virtues spoken of in the letter (1:5-7, 16; 2:9). Even to argue that the letter was written by a disciple of Peter still involves the writer is a misrepresentation. Furthermore, the content of the letter is quite different than what one would find in a second century Pseudepigraphical letter. It is not common for Pseudepigraphical writers to speak in the first person in epistolary literature, to demean their own reputation (3:15), to borrow from other writers,⁷ and to promote morality and orthodoxy.

The *fourth* argument used to dismiss 2 Peter's authenticity is to note that 2 Peter borrowed from Jude. Because Peter died (A.D. 64) before Jude was written (A.D. 70), someone writing after Peter's death obviously did the borrowing and writing of 2 Peter. However, this argument collapses

⁷ This point is only valid if one accepts the proposition that 2 Peter borrowed from Jude.

if Petrine priority is acknowledged.⁸ The *fifth* argument used to dismiss 2 Peter's authenticity is to note that many of its phrases and concepts are from the second century. For example, some argue that the false teachers described in the letter represent second century Gnostics. However, the New Testament routinely warns of the imminent rise of false teachers (Acts 20:29-31; Rom 16:17-18; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 3:8; 1 John 2:18-19; 4:1) and Peter could have been dealing with an incipient form of Gnosticism.

Moreover, others contend that 2 Peter 3 must have been written at a time when the church had lost its hope in Christ's return. However, the situation described in this chapter has more to do with false teachers ridiculing Christ's return. Still others believe that the situation depicted in 2 Peter 3 has more in common with Stoic eschatology of the second century. However, while such eschatology depicted the end of the universe in terms of numerous conflagrations, Peter describes it as a one-time event. Also 2 Peter 3 is devoid of second century eschatological concepts such as Chiliasm and Montanism.

In addition, it is argued that because 2 Peter 3:15-16 refers to all Paul's letters, it must have been written after they had all been collected in the second century. However, the phrase may refer to only those letters known to Peter at the time through his personal contact with Paul.⁹ The reference to the inspiration of Paul's writings does not demand a later date since Paul considered all his writings inspired (2 Thess 3:14; 1 Cor 2:16; 7:17; 14:37-39). Also, the reference to Paul as a beloved brother need not have been written after Paul's death since Peter had already demonstrated an affinity for Paul (Acts 15:7; Gal 2:9).

⁸ For a defense of Petrine priority, see my Jude argument.

⁹ The phrase "long suffering and salvation" (3:15) may only refer to 1 Timothy 1:15-16 rather than the entire Pauline corpus.

Finally, miscellaneous phrases commonly understood as originating in the second century need not be understood as such. While the concepts of divine nature (1:4), knowledge, and virtue are typically associated with second century Hellenism, they are also found in Josephus, Colossians, and Isaiah respectively. The phrase “apostles and prophets” (3:2) is found in Ephesians 2:20. Although Mount Transfiguration was only known as “holy” (1:18) in the second century, “holy” can also be used to specify anywhere God revealed Himself (Exod 15:13; Pss 2:6; 3:4). Also, the phrase “passing of the fathers” (3:4) need not refer to the death of church fathers as it could easily refer to the death of the patriarchs (Acts 3:13; Rom 9:5; Heb 1:1).¹⁰ It is also unwarranted to presume that the writer is excluding himself from the band of apostles through the use of the phrase “your apostles” (3:2). He could merely have been referring to those apostles personally known to the readers.

Despite the previously discussed problems associated with the external evidence, *internal* evidence favoring Petrine authorship of the letter is quite strong. The writer identifies himself as Peter (1:1). Interestingly, he also uses the unusual name Symeon. Had the writer been a forger, he probably would have slavishly followed Peter’s normal designation as Simon (Matt 16:16) so as not to draw attention to himself. The writer also refers to his reader’s faith as “the same kind as ours.” This may reflect Peter’s experiences in Acts 10 where he learned that both Jews and Gentiles are saved the same way. He also calls his letter his second letter (3:1). This reference probably refers to 1 Peter. Given the commonalities between the two books, the writer of the first book is also the same author who wrote the second book. Also, his endorsement of Paul’s writings (3:15) would seem a bit presumptuous if an apostle had not written the book.

¹⁰ This view better fits the context since the other items in 2 Peter 3, such as creation and flood, are all drawn from Genesis as well.

Moreover, similarities can be seen in between the language of 2 Peter and Peter's sermons as recorded in Acts. Both make use of "obtained" (1:1; Acts 1:17), "godliness" or "holiness" (1:3, 6, 7; 3:11; Acts 3:12), "unlawful" or "wicked" (2:8; Acts 2:23), "reward of unrighteousness" or "iniquity" (2:13, 15; Acts 1:18), "the Day of the Lord" (3:10; Acts 2:20), "punishment" (2:9; Acts 4:21), and "received" or "shared"(1:1; Acts 1:17). Finally, the letter makes several references to Peter's relationship with Christ during the latter's earthly ministry. Such references include Peter's imminent death (1:13-14; John 21:18-19) and his presence on the Mount of Transfiguration (1:15-18; Matt 17:1-13). Such a practice is similar to the way that Peter recounted his experiences with Christ in his first letter (5:1).

Date

The letter was written after Paul had written some of his letters (3:15-16). It was also written after 1 Peter (3:1). However, the letter was written sometime prior to A.D. 70 since it makes no mention of the fall of Jerusalem, which was a topic that would have been extremely important to a Jewish audience. It was obviously written before A.D. 67 since this is the date of Peter's martyrdom (1:14). Another reason that the letter had to have been written prior to A.D. 67 is that Paul surely would have mentioned Peter while writing 2 Timothy from Rome if Peter had been alive at that time. Because the letter makes no reference to the persecution of believers by Nero, it must have been written just prior to the Neronian persecution. Thus, assigning a date of A.D. 64 for the composition of the letter would not be far from wrong.

Recipients and Place of Writing

Because the recipients are not identified in the salutation (1:1) and because the letter is Peter's second (3:1), it is likely that the same group mentioned in 1 Peter 1:1 is the same group

addressed in the second letter. Because this letter represents Peter's second letter, it is probable that he wrote it from the same place as his first epistle. Thus, a Babylonian place of writing is likely.¹¹ However, because tradition indicates that Peter died in Rome in A.D. 67, it is also possible Peter penned this letter from that great city just before his death.

Occasion for Writing and Opponents

Peter wrote to warn his audience of the advent of false teachers. Apparently, Peter already knew of them. His repetitious use of the present tense indicates that they were already at work in surrounding communities (2:12, 17, 18; 3:5, 16). Peter seems to be combating an incipient form of Gnosticism in the letter. Gnostics held to dualism, which taught that the physical world was evil and the spiritual world was good. This worldview negatively impacted their Christology. If the physical world was bad, then Christ could not come in the flesh. Thus, Gnostics denied Christ's atonement (2:1) and Second Advent (3:4; 2 John 7).

Dualism also led to license. Because it was believed that nothing could be done about the physical world being evil, then it was acceptable to indulge the fleshly appetites. If matter was hopelessly evil, then responsibility for lax morals could be passed off as "I am not doing evil. Rather, it is my body that is doing evil." If the physical world was evil, then a person could blame their sin on their body thus allowing them to deny moral responsibility. Thus, Peter's opponents were involved in gross immorality (2:4-18). Gnostics also believed that they possessed secret knowledge not accessible to the ordinary person (1:20). This higher knowledge gave them a feeling of superiority in comparison to others (2:10-11).¹²

¹¹ For a discussion of Babylon as the place of writing for 1 Peter, see my 1 Peter argument.

¹² For a fuller discussion of Gnosticism, see my 1 John argument.

Purpose and Message

The *purpose* of the letter is to build up its readers in the faith so that they will be insulated from the persuasiveness of the coming false teachers. Thus, 2 Peter was written for a different purpose than 1 Peter.¹³

| 1 Peter | 2 Peter |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| External opposition | Internal opposition |
| Persecution | False teaching |
| Suffering | Error |
| Hope | Knowledge |
| Encourage | Expose |
| Comfort | Caution |
| Holiness | Maturity |
| Pain with a purpose | Poison in the pew |
| Christ exemplified suffering | Christ's return |
| Similarities to Paul (Ephesians) | Similarities to Jude |

The *message* of the letter is that Christians should pursue “spiritual *growth* so they can combat *apostasy* as they look forward to the *Lord's return*.”¹⁴

Sub Purposes

In addition to this overarching purpose, Peter wrote to accomplish several sub purposes. *First*, he wanted to promote morality among his audience (1:12-13). *Second*, he wanted to leave a written record of his teaching in view of his imminent death (1:14-15; 3:1). *Third*, he wanted to see his audience mature (1:1-11; 3:17-18). *Fourth*, he wanted to predict his rapidly approaching death (1:12-15). *Fifth*, he wanted to demonstrate that the transfiguration guarantees the coming of the kingdom (1:16-18).

¹³ This chart has been adapted from Wilkinson and Boa, *Talk Thru the Bible*, 480; *Nelson's Complete Book of Charts and Maps*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 466.

¹⁴ Gangel, “2 Peter,” 862. Italicization mine.

Sixth, he wanted to defend the doctrine of the second coming as divinely inspired (1:19-21). *Seventh*, he wanted to give the characteristics of false teachers (2:1-22). *Eighth*, he wanted to explain the delay in Christ's Parousia (3:1-9). *Ninth*, he wanted to detail the Day of the Lord (3:10-14). *Tenth*, he wanted to explain the tactics of the false teachers (3:15-16). *Eleventh*, he wanted to remind his readers of the basics of Christianity (1:12-13; 3:1-2).

Unique Characteristics

Peter's second letter boasts several outstanding characteristics. *First*, the book frequently mentions knowledge. Cognates of the verb "to know (oida or ginwsksw) are found 16 times throughout the letter. Thus, knowledge is the best way to insulate believers from the influence of false teachers. *Second*, along with 2 Timothy 3:16, the letter contains one of the classic statements describing the inspiration of the Scripture (1:19-21). *Third*, the letter not only indicates that Old Testament Scripture is inspired but that the New Testament Scripture is inspired as well (3:2, 15-16). Thus, the letter offers one of the few passages confirming the inspiration of the New Testament (1 Tim 5:17-18; 2 Thess 3:14; John 14:26; 16:13). *Fourth*, the letter provides the only New Testament passage describing how the present universe will be destroyed. While other New Testament passages announce its soon destruction (Matt 24:35), only 2 Peter 3 describes the method of its destruction.

Fifth, the letter exemplifies a polemical style by taking Gnostic terminology, such as "knowledge," and refilling it with Christian content. Peter follows this practice in an attempt to demonstrate the supremacy of Christianity over incipient Gnosticism. *Sixth*, just as 2 Timothy represents Paul's last will and testament, 2 Peter similarly represents Peter's last will and testament. *Seventh*, the letter makes repeated use of the word "remembrance." Note the following phrases:

"Has forgotten (literally, 'having received forgetfulness') that he has been cleansed" (1:9)

- “I will always remind you of these things” (1:12)
- “It is right to refresh your memory” (1:13)
- “You will always be able to remember these things” (1:15)
- “I have written both of them as reminders” (3:1)
- “Do not forget” (3:8)
- “Bear in mind (literally, consider)” (3:15)

Eighth, 2 Peter and Jude are so similar that both must be understood together. *Ninth*, while Paul warns of false teaching among the flock, Peter warns of it among the shepherds.

Structure

The book contains three main sections. Each section is its own complete chapter. *First*, Peter exhorts his readers on the path of Christian maturity (1:1-21). *Second*, he functions as a kind of Paul Revere in warning about the advent of false teachers. Here, he describes their characteristics and condemns them (2:1-22). *Third*, he refutes the uniformitarian doctrine that the false teachers will introduce and expresses confidence in Christ’s return (3:1-18).

Outline

- I. Call to spiritual growth (1:1-21)
 - A. Introduction (1:1-2)
 - 1. Writer: Peter (1:1a)
 - 2. Recipients: same as those in the first letter (1:1b)
 - 3. Salutation: grace and peace coming through knowledge (1:2)
 - B. Exhortation to grow (1:3-11)
 - 1. Provision for growth (1:3-4)
 - a) Divine power (1:3a)
 - b) Knowledge (1:3b)
 - c) Promises (1:4a)
 - d) Divine nature (1:4b)
 - 2. Portrait of growth (1:5-7)
 - a) Faith (1:5a)
 - b) Excellence (1:5b)
 - c) Knowledge (1:5c)
 - d) Self-control (1:6a)
 - e) Perseverance (1:6b)
 - f) Godliness (1:6c)
 - g) Kindness (1:7a)

- h) Love (1:7b)
 - 3. Product of growth (1:8-11)
 - a) Productivity (1:8)
 - b) Vision: living consistently with spiritual identity (1:9)
 - c) Assurance (1:10)
 - d) Stability: not stumbling (1:10b)
 - e) Rewarded in the kingdom (1:11)
- C. Peter's first purpose statement (1:12-15)
 - 1. Peter's desire to remind (1:12-13)
 - 2. Reason: Peter's imminent martyrdom (1:14)
 - 3. Peter's action: create a record of his teaching (1:15)
- D. Proof of coming kingdom (1:16-21)
 - 1. Kingdom guaranteed by the transfiguration (1:16-18)
 - 2. Kingdom prophesied in the Old Testament (1:19-21)
- II. Description of false teachers (2:1-22)
 - A. Their predicted arrival (2:1a)
 - B. Their devices (2:1b-3)
 - 1. False teaching (2:1b)
 - 2. Pernicious ways (2:2a)
 - 3. Evil speaking of the truth (2:2b)
 - 4. Covetousness (2:3a)
 - 5. Feigned words (2:3b)
 - 6. Making merchandise of the flock (2:3c)
 - C. Their doom (2:4-9)
 - 1. God's pattern of judgment (2:4-6)
 - a) Judgment of angel's in Noah's day (2:4)
 - b) Judgment of Noah's world (2:5)
 - c) Judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah (2:6)
 - 2. God spared Lot (2:7-8)
 - 3. Conclusion: God will protect Peter's audience against false teachers (2:9)
 - D. Their depravity (2:10-16)
 - 1. Lustful (2:10a)
 - 2. Lawless (2:10b-11)
 - 3. Ignorant (2:12)
 - 4. Immoral (2:13-14)
 - 5. Covetousness (2:15-16)
 - E. Their emptiness (2:17-19)
 - F. Their return to their former state (2:20-22)
- III. Refutation of false teachers' doctrine (3:1-18)
 - A. Peter's second purpose statement (3:1-2)
 - B. Refutation of false teachers' denial of the Second Advent (3:3-14)
 - 1. False teachers' motives for denying second Advent (3:3-4)
 - a) Lust (3:3)
 - b) Uniformitarianism (3:4)
 - 2. Refutation of uniformitarianism (3:5-10)
 - a) Argument from history (3:5-7)

- i) Creation (3:5)
 - ii) Flood (3:6-7)
- b) Argument from Scripture (3:8)
- c) Argument from God's character (3:9)
- d) Argument from divine promise (3:10)
- 3. Practical ramifications of refuting Uniformitarianism (3:11-14)
 - a) Practical impact (3:11a)
 - b) Holiness (3:11b)
 - c) Evangelism (3:12)
 - d) Hope (3:13)
 - e) Holiness reiterated (3:14)
- C. Concluding exhortations (3:15-18)
 - 1. Paul as an example of grace (3:15a)
 - 2. Be on guard against false teachers (3:15b-17)
 - 3. Press on to maturity (3:18)

Argument

It has been said that the best defense is a good offense. Therefore, an antidote to the effects of false teachers is Christian maturity. Because false teachers entice the unstable (2:14), in the first major section of the book (1:1-21), Peter exhorts his audience to pursue Christian maturity. In the introduction (1:1-2), after briefly identifying himself as the writer (1:1a) and his audience (1:1b), he offers a salutation (1:2). In this salutation, he observes that grace and peace will come to the readers through knowledge. Here, Peter identifies knowledge of the truth as the essential ingredient for resisting the allurements of the false teachers. It is through the acquisition of such knowledge that Peter's readers will reach maturity. Here, Peter takes a pagan concept and refills it with Christian truth. The Gnostics promoted secret knowledge. However, Peter explains that true knowledge of God will keep his readers free from the influence of the Gnostics.

Next Peter explains that all of the resources necessary for spiritual growth have already been bestowed upon the believer (1:3-4). Believers already have everything they need to attain life and godliness (2 Tim 3:17). Thus they already have everything they need to resist the allurements of the false teachers. In contrast to the Gnostics who taught that people needed secret knowledge, Peter

indicates that these resources have already been bestowed upon every believer. Such resources include divine power (1:3a), knowledge (1:3b), promises (1:4a), and even participation in the divine nature (1:4b). As Peter's readers learn to draw upon these resources, they will find they have an ability to resist the lust of the world system. In other words, they will have a capacity to turn down the allurements of Gnosticism.

Now that Peter has described the provision for growth (1:3-4), he next furnishes a portrait of growth (1:5-7). In these verses, he describes what Christian maturity looks like. It is unfair to ask someone to run a race without first telling him where the finish line is located. Thus, Peter augments his exhortation for his readers to pursue maturity with a portrait of what Christian maturity looks like. To create this portrait in the minds of his readers, Peter employs a literary device called a sorites. A "sorites (from the Gr. Soros, a heap) is a set of statements that proceed, step by step, to a climactic conclusion through the force of logic or reliance upon a series of indisputable facts. Each new statement picks up the last key word or phrase of the preceding one."¹⁵ By using this literary device, Peter skillfully weaves together eight Christian virtues exemplifying maturity. The list begins with faith and ends with love.

Peter's inclusion of the phrase "add to your faith" (1:5) indicates that these attributes only become a reality when believers cooperate with God by drawing upon the divine resources in pursuit of progressive sanctification. This portrait of Christian character stands in sharp contrast to the licentiousness introduced by Gnostic dualism. Because knowledge is also on the list (1:5), this list stands in sharp contrast to the notion that secret knowledge could only be attained through allegiance to Gnostic teachers. In sum, Peter understands, that if his readers exhibit the traits in this list, they will have the maturity necessary to withstand the false teachers.

¹⁵ Constable, "Notes on 2 Peter," 10, n. 36.

Now that Peter has identified the resources for growth (1:3-4) and given a portrait of growth (1:5-7), he next provides the incentives for growth (1:8-11). In this paragraph, Peter furnishes five incentives for pursuing maturity. In other words, five blessings will manifest themselves in the lives of believers when they pursue maturity. First, believers will be productive (1:8). Second, they will live in harmony with their new identity. In other words, they will not forget they are a new creation and consequently lapse back into their old way of life (1:9).¹⁶ Third, they will gain further assurance of their salvation (1:10a).¹⁷ Fourth, believers will have stability in this life (10b). They will not stumble. Such stability is Peter's primary goal for his readers. He knows that if his readers mature, they will not be swayed by false teachers who prey upon the unstable (2:14). Fifth, they will be richly rewarded when they enter the kingdom.¹⁸ While all believers will enter the kingdom, they will not all be equally rewarded in the kingdom. Only those who have progressed in the area of practical sanctification will receive such a reward. Therefore, Peter's readers should pursue maturity not only to resist the allurements of the false teachers but also to experience these additional benefits.

Peter interrupts his train of thought by giving his first purpose statement for the letter (1:12-15). His ambition is to remind his readers of the basics of Christianity (1:12-13).¹⁹ He knows that if his readers master these basics, the Gnostics will not be able to sway them away from the truth. However, his concern is that after his impending death, he will not be present to remind his readers

¹⁶ Some attempt to portray the person depicted here as an unbeliever. However, this view does not fit the context. The surrounding verses describe the person as cleansed (1:9), having the potential of achieving practical sanctification (1:5-7), and being rewarded upon entering the kingdom (1:11).

¹⁷ The believer already has assurance of salvation based upon the promises of God (John 5:24). However, this assurance is given further confirmation as the believer progresses in practical sanctification. Because "make" is in the middle voice, the idea here is that we make ourselves surer of our salvation.

¹⁸ Here, the kingdom is portrayed as a future reality.

¹⁹ Peter's emphasis upon reminding alleviates modern ministers of the burden of having to teach something new every Sunday.

of these fundamentals (1:14). Thus, he wanted to preserve these reminders in written form so that his readers will have them at their fingertips even after his departure (1:15).

Peter's emphasis upon the kingdom (1:11) would logically cause his readers to ask whether the kingdom will ever become a reality. The Davidic messiah had already come and yet the kingdom was not yet a reality. This absence violated the Jewish perspective that the coming of the king and the kingdom would be a simultaneous event (Isa 9:6-7). Thus, Peter gives two proofs to his Jewish readership that the kingdom will come (1:16-21). First, Christ's transfiguration guaranteed the ultimate manifestation of the kingdom (1:16-18). Peter was an eyewitness to this event.²⁰ Peter's recounting of his eyewitness testimony also verifies his authority to write the letter. Second, the eventual manifestation of the kingdom is predicted in the pages of the Old Testament. In fact, because it is divinely authored,²¹ the witness of Scripture is even more powerful than Peter's own eyewitness testimony of Christ's transfiguration.²²

²⁰ Peter's claim that he had not followed cleverly devised tales (1:16) may be another polemical "jab" against the Gnostics so called "higher knowledge." While Peter's knowledge came from his own eyewitness testimony of the Lord's earthly ministry, the Gnostics "superior knowledge" was not similarly based upon eyewitness testimony.

²¹ The verb *ferw* (1:21) is also used to describe a wind filling up a boat's sails so that the boat is propelled (Acts 27:15, 17). In the same way, the Holy Spirit empowered the authors of Scripture so that they ended up recording God's message. The notion that Scripture is not a matter of one's private interpretation (1:20) has provoked debate. Some have taken this verse as pertaining to personal interpretation. According to this line of thought, a person cannot interpret prophetic Scripture without the assistance of either the church, the Holy Spirit, other prophetic Scripture, other believers, or the fulfillment of the predicted events. This view has in its favor the context of chapter two which deals with how false teachers misinterpret Scripture and the fact that *epil usews* is translated as "interpret" in Mark 4:34 and Acts 19:39. However, it seems better to argue that verse 20 is saying that Scripture originated with God rather than the prophet's private interpretation. *Ginomai* is translated as "origination" rather than "interpretation in the LXX and the fathers. The context also seems to support the origin of divine truth rather than its interpretation (1:16-18). In fact, verse 21 is a classic inspiration verse. The "for" at the beginning of verse 21 connects it to verse 20. This notion of origin rather than interpretation also fits well with chapter two. While the false teachers prophesy delusions of their own minds (Jer 23:16; Ezek 13:3), God's word originated with the Holy Spirit. Origin is also in view in Peter's first letter (1:10-12). Toussaint, "The Second Epistle of Peter," 2.

²² Some interpret "made more sure" (1:19) as communicating the idea that Peter's testimony is a first witness and the Scripture is a second witness. However, this view unnecessarily disparages the testimony of the prophets as if they needed a second witness to confirm their veracity. Rather, Peter's citation of the second proof relates to the fact that it is even more sure than Peter's eyewitness testimony. J. Carl Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions: A Survey of Problem Passages and Issues from Every Book of the Bible* (Kregel: Grand Rapids, 1997), 320.

If Peter's purpose in writing is to warn his audience of coming false teachers, how can they be wary of something they cannot identify? Thus, Peter spends the second major section of his letter identifying these false prophets (2:1-22). Peter begins this section by predicting the arrival of false teachers (2:1a). What makes them especially dangerous is that they will arise from within the church. Peter goes on to give the various methodologies that these false teachers will employ (2:1b-3).

Peter then spells out the doom of these false prophets.²³ While God will judge these false prophets, He will also protect Peter's readers from being swept away by their deception (2:4-9). This pattern of preserving the righteous while condemning the wicked is consistent with God's actions in history. Peter proves this point by citing three examples. Interestingly, all three examples deal with sexual license. Thus, Peter seems to have intentionally selected these examples to show what will ultimately become of the Gnostics who espouse sexual licentiousness. First, God spared the innocent angels but imprisoned those who sinned in Noah's day (2:4).²⁴ Second, God spared Noah in the ark while flooding Noah's world (2:5). Third, God spared Lot while destroying Sodom and Gomorrah (2:6-8). Thus, God will judge the false teachers and protect Peter's audience from their pernicious influence (2:9).²⁵

Peter goes on to describe the depravity of the false teachers (2:10-18). They are marked by lust (2:10a), lawlessness (2:10b-11), ignorance (2:12), and immorality (2:13-14). Their covetousness is reminiscent of Balaam (2:15-16), the Old Testament prophet who was seduced by

²³ Peter earlier announced the doom of the false prophets (2:1, 3).

²⁴ Does verse 4 refer to the fall of Satan or the events surrounding Gen 6:1-4? The latter interpretation is preferred. First, this view fits well with the next verse. Arguably, the presence of the *kai* at the beginning of verse 5 connects it with verse 4. Second, the other books closely connected with 2 Peter also seem to allude to this event (1 Pet 3:19-20; Jude 6). Third, because the other allusions in this chapter are to Genesis, it is not surprising that verse 4 is also alluding back to Genesis.

²⁵ The protasis begins in verse 4 and does not find its apodosis until verse 9. Verse 9 also seems to indicate that the unrighteous are presently undergoing judgment (Luke 16:19-31). Toussaint, "The Second Epistle of Peter," 2.

money (Num 22). Such a description epitomizes Gnostic licentiousness. Peter also mentions their emptiness. While promising freedom, they end up enslaving those who fall under their doctrinal spell. They have no ability to liberate others since they themselves are under bondage (2:17-19). Their final state will be worse than their former state (2:20-22).²⁶ Peter furnishes these descriptions so that his readers will recognize the false teachers once they arrive.

Peter transitions into the letter's final chapter by giving his second purpose statement (3:1-2). His goal in writing is to direct his readers' attention back to Christianity's foundational teachings. Peter's premise is that if his readers are established in sound doctrine, then they will have the fortitude necessary to resist the siren song of the false teachers. Thus, Peter wrote his second letter to remind his readers of the faith's most basic principles as espoused by the prophets and apostles.

²⁶ Are those described in verses 20-22 unbelievers or believers? Some say these are unbelievers since they are described as dogs and pigs that return to their own vomit and mire (Prov 26:11). It is also argued that Peter must be depicting unbelievers since the verb *htwntai* (overcome) is used to describe them. Because such pervasive sin could never control a believer (1 John 3:6-9), it is thought that an unbeliever must be in view. Also, it is thought that they must be unbelievers since they are mentioned in the same chapter along with others who are unbelievers, such as the fallen angels, the inhabitants of Noah's world, and the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah. A final argument that unbelievers are in view is verse 20, which indicates that their last state is worse than their first state. How could a saved person ever be worse off than an unsaved person? However, most of these arguments seem predicated upon the assumption that a believer cannot be dominated by sin. This assumption can be challenged since this same chapter furnishes examples of believers controlled by sin (2:7-8, 15-16). Several reasons make it more likely that believers are in view. *First*, they are described as those who have been purchased by Christ (2:1). However, this argument should not be pushed too far since verse 1 may be speaking of the universal atonement. *Second*, they are described as escaping the defilement of the world through the knowledge of Christ (2:20). The only way around this verse is to argue that they had some sort of moral reformation but not an actual conversion (John 5:35). However, this argument is unlikely since Peter consistently uses *epignwsei* to communicate someone's full participation in and knowledge of the gospel. *Third*, Peter used an earlier example that showed that believers still have a propensity for gross sin (1:8-10). *Fourth*, the chapter holds up both unbelievers and believers as negative examples. Both Lot (2:7-8) and Balaam (2:15-16) were believers. *Fifth*, the phrase "the last state has become worse for them than the first" (2:20) could be describing a believer. This phrase is explained in the next verse, which says, "For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness" (21). The words translated "would be better" could represent a tendential perfect where "the action tends toward the realization but falls short." Therefore, in verse 21, Peter is saying, "it would just about have been better" for these people to be unsaved. Thus, Peter is not categorically stating that it is better for these false teachers to remain unsaved. Because new Christians have the light of the gospel, they are more accountable to God in comparison to unbelievers. "The greater the light, the greater the accountability." In this sense, a saved sinner may almost be worse off than an unsaved sinner. Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions: A Survey of Problem Passages and Issues from Every Book of the Bible*, 321.

Previously, Peter exhorted his readers to maturity so that they will not be unstable and thus vulnerable to false teaching (1:1-21). He also taught his readers how to identify the coming false teachers (2:1-22). In the letter's final section (3:3-13), Peter teaches his readers how to respond to the specific doctrinal attack that they will introduce. He predicts that the false teachers will arise and ridicule the doctrine of the Second Advent (3:3-4). Thus, in this section, Peter gives his readers the tools necessary for responding to this attack. He does this so that they will not be caught off guard by their arguments but rather know how to refute them even before the false teachers arrive.

Before providing this refutation, he explains the false teachers' motives for denying Christ's return. First, they are controlled by lust (3:3). Those dominated by the sinful nature have a natural aversion toward the doctrine of the Second Coming since Christ's return is associated with the notions of accountability and judgment. Also, as previously explained, Gnostics looked unfavorably upon Christ returning in the flesh because of their presupposition that the material world is evil. Second, they have capitulated to a uniformitarian worldview. According to this viewpoint, the future is determined by the observable past. Because no miraculous divine interventions have been observed in history, then neither will a future miraculous intervention of God take place via the Second Coming (3:4).

Peter offers a fourfold refutation to such errant thinking (3:5-10).²⁷ First, Peter appeals to history (3:5-7) by reminding his readers that God has twice miraculously intervened in history through creation (3:5)²⁸ and the flood (3:6-7). The same "word of God" that ushered in these events will one day be issued again and a third miraculous intervention will occur through Christ's return. Second, Peter appeals to Scripture (3:8). He uses Psalm 90:4 to show that God is outside of time

²⁷ For this fourfold argument, I am indebted to Green, *2 Peter and Jude*, 140-52.

²⁸ Peter's uses of the participle *qel ontas* shows that these false teachers willfully suppress these truths (Rom 1:18). The phrase "out of water and by water" may refer to God first forming the world out of water (Gen 1:6-8) and then bringing the dry land out of the water (Gen 1:9-10).

and thus does not reckon time the same way man does. While it seems as if there has been an interminable delay in Christ's return from man's time bound perspective, it does not seem this way from God's timeless perspective.

Third, Peter appeals to God's character (3:9) by explaining that God purposely delays His return so as to give as many as possible an opportunity to get right with Him before the eschatological judgment transpires. Thus, the delay in His return is actually a blessing in disguise.²⁹ Fourth, Peter appeals to divine promise by explaining that God is all-powerful and will fulfill His promise of returning in accordance with His schedule (3:10).³⁰ Knowing this fourfold refutation in advance will help protect Peter's readers from being swayed by the coming attacks that the Gnostics will launch against the doctrine of the Second Coming.

Rejecting Gnostic uniformitarianism and instead living in the hope of the Lord's return has profound ethical implications for the believer (3:11-15a). After acknowledging the practical import of the Second Coming (3:11a), Peter enumerates the various ways this doctrine changes the believer's life. The Second Coming motivates the believer in the areas of holiness (3:11b, 14) and hope (3:13). It even stimulates the believer toward evangelism (3:12) when he comprehends that his evangelistic activity can actually hasten the Lord's return (Rom 11:25). Rehearsing these ethical implications shows Peter's audience why they must maintain their hope in Christ's return by rejecting Gnostic uniformitarianism.

In his concluding exhortations (3:15-18), Peter points to Paul as a further example of how God postpones judgment in order to accomplish grace. Because of such grace, Paul was brought to faith (3:15a). However, Paul's conversion has also given opportunity to the false teachers. Some of

²⁹ God's postponement of judgment is consistent with actions in history (Gen 6:3; 15:13, 16).

³⁰ The "Day of the Lord" is a non-technical term depicting anytime God manifests Himself by intervening in history. In this context, it is used to describe His return and the dissolution of the universe. These events will take place at the end of the final judgment just prior to the inauguration of the eternal state (Rev 21:1).

Paul's writings are difficult to understand and the false teachers deliberately twist his hard sayings in an attempt to find further support for their theological views. Thus, Peter warns how the false teachers will attempt to throw his readers into confusion (3:15b-17). Peter ends the letter in the same way in which he began it. He explains that Christian maturity is the best antidote against the deleterious influence of the coming apostates (3:18).

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³¹ Bigg is an example of a critical commentary. Wuest, Mayor, and Reicke are examples of exegetical commentaries. Blum and Barbieri are examples of expositional commentaries. McGee and Wiersbe are examples of devotional commentaries.

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