

Handout 1: The Second Letter of Peter

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| Biblical Period | # 12: The Universal Church of the New and Eternal Covenant (the final age of man) | | |
| Covenant | # 8: New Covenant in Christ Jesus | | |
| Focus | Christian character | Condemnation of false teachers | Confidence in the Second Coming of the Lord |
| Scripture | 1:1-----2:1-----3:1-----3:18 | | |
| Division | Greeting and teaching on Christian maturity by growing in holiness | Dangers of false teaching | Persecution and mockery before the return of the Lord and closing doxology |
| Topic | True prophecy based on authority of the Church | False prophets | Prophecy of the return of Jesus on the "Day of the Lord" |
| | Living in Holiness | Avoiding Heresy | Living in Hope |
| Location | Probably Rome | | |
| Time | c. AD 67 (shortly before Peter's martyrdom) | | |
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| Comparison of the Letters of 1 and 2 Peter | |
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| 1 Peter | 2 Peter |
| Theme: Advice to the newly baptized and hope in the midst of suffering. | Theme: The dangers of listening to false teaching and the need to discern false prophets. |
| Christological teaching: Sharing in the life of Christ in Christian baptism and glory in uniting with the sufferings of Christ. | Christological teaching: The glory of Christ and the climax of human history at His Second Coming. |
| Frequently used title for God the Son: "Christos"/Messiah = redemptive title. | Frequently used title for God the Son: "Kyrios"/Lord = title of universal dominion. |
| Exhortation: You are among "the chosen" elect; have hope and be encouraged in your present trials. | Exhortation: Christians need full knowledge and right teaching of the Church to discern false teaching and to be prepared for eschatological judgment. |
| Compared with other N.T. letters: Similarities to the teachings of St. Paul in Letters to the Ephesians and Colossians. | Compared with other N.T. letters: Similarities to warnings of eschatological judgment in the Letter of St. Jude. |
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Handout 2: The Second Letter of Peter

Answers to objections to 1 and 2 Peter being written by same author:

1. While it is true that the Greek of 2 Peter is not as polished as that of 1 Peter, this difference can be accounted for by Peter using a secretary to write down his letter other than Silvanus who wrote the first letter (1 Pt 5:12).
2. The differences in vocabulary can be attributed to the very different focus and subject matter between the two letters.
3. The similarities between 2 Peter and Jude can be explained by either Jude quoting from 2 Peter, as is suggested in Jude verses 17-18 compared with 2 Peter 3:3, or that by the time the two letters were written the context of both letters was the common doctrine of the Church.
4. Peter mentions a form of Gnosticism that is believed to have emerged after Peter's death in the early 2nd century AD. No heresy springs up overnight; the progression of false teaching emerges over time as a full heresy. It is possible the kind of false teaching Peter condemns grew over time into the fully heretical Gnosticism of the 2nd century.

No other two books in the New Testament are as much alike as 1 Peter and 2 Peter. In 2 Peter 3:1 the author reminds the receivers of his letter that this is the second letter he has written to them. Despite the internal and external problems detractors have pointed out to the authorship of 2 Peter by St. Peter the Apostle and Bishop of Rome, the traditional defense of Petrine authorship by the Church Fathers overcomes these difficulties.

The three ways the writer of the letter identifies himself and the significance:

1. "Symeon Petros": the Greek transliteration of his Hebrew name and the title Jesus gave him translated in Greek.
2. "A slave": his status as a humble slave/servant of Jesus Christ in the same way God's emissaries have been identified in the Old and New Testaments. See some examples in Ex 14:31 (Moses); 2 Sam 7:5 (David); Ps 89:3 (David); Is 41:8 (Israel); Jer 7:25 and 26:5 (the prophets); Rom 1:1 (Paul); Jam 1:1 (James); Jude 1:1 (Jude) and Rev 1:1 and 7:3 (all the baptized who love and serve Christ).
3. "An Apostle of Jesus Christ": his title of authority as Christ's representative and one of the twelve spiritual fathers of the Church

1:19b and the morning star rises in your hearts.

The beautifully poetic image of the "morning star" can have three meanings:

1. It could mean the actual morning star that is the planet Venus and its rising in the sky that announces the "new day" and metaphorically announces the "new day" of the Lord's Kingdom of heaven on earth which is the Church.

2. The “morning star” can be an indirect reference to Numbers 24:17 and the promise that “a star will rise from Jacob,” which can be interpreted as the promise of David as God’s anointed (hence the “star of David” symbol) who is Jesus’ ancestor. The Messiah was prophesied to come from the lineage of David to “shepherd” God’s restored people (Ez 34:23-24). Jesus is both the “root” of David (Rev 5:5) and his heir, “the bright morning star” who will rule over David’s kingdom forever (Lk 1:32-33; Rev 22:16).
3. But it can also refer to Jesus and the prophetic image of the star of Bethlehem that announced the coming of the Messiah-King who is destined to redeem His people and usher in the Messianic Age (Mic 5:1; Mt 2:2).

In Revelation 2:28 the “morning star” symbolized Jesus’ resurrection victory over death, and in Revelation 22:16, the glorified Christ tells St. John: *I, Jesus, sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the root and offspring of David, the bright morning star*” (Rev 22:16). Peter may be referring to the Christian’s share in the resurrection and glory of Christ since the morning star announces each new day and its symbolic rebirth/resurrection. But since Christ Himself is referred to as “the bright and morning star in Revelation 22:16, it seems as likely to refer to the presence of Christ who is the light of the eternal day (Rev 21:23). After all, the ultimate reward of each Christian is to be with His Lord in perfect communion.

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Handout 3: The Second Letter of Peter

1:20 Know this first of all, that there is no prophecy of scripture that is a matter of personal interpretation, for no prophecy ever came through human will; but rather human beings being moved by the Holy Spirit spoke under the influence of God

1. The interpretation of the Sacred Word is not a matter to be left entirely to personal interpretation.
2. The final authority on the interpretation of Sacred Scripture must be the authority of the Church that has the knowledge of Scripture Jesus imparted to her protected by the Holy Spirit.
3. All of Sacred Scripture is the inspired word of God written down by men moved by the Holy Spirit.

This is not to say one cannot interpret a passage from Scripture that one reads; however, if that personal interpretation is at odds with the teachings of the Church, it is the Church's teaching and interpretation that prevails. The Second Vatican Council indicates three criteria for interpreting Scripture in accordance with the Holy Spirit who inspired it:

1. Be attentive to the content and unity of the whole of Sacred Scripture. This means reading every verse in the context of every passage, every passage in the context of every chapter, every chapter in the context of every Bible book and every Bible book within the context of Sacred Scripture as a whole. See CCC 112.
2. Read Scripture within "the living Tradition of the Church." It is the Tradition passed orally from Jesus to His Apostles and disciples and from them to their disciples who were the first bishops of the Church and down to us. "The Church carries in her Tradition the living memorial of God's Word, and it is the Holy Spirit who gives her the spiritual interpretation of the Scripture, 'according to the spiritual meaning which the Spirit grants to the Church'" (CCC 113, quoting Origen, *Homilies in Leviticus*, 5.5).
3. One must be attentive to the coherence of the truths of faith in themselves and within the whole plan of divine revelation. See CCC 114.

One must also take into account the different senses of Scripture (CCC 115-118):

- Literal sense
- Spiritual sense; and within the spiritual sense:
 1. the allegorical sense
 2. the moral sense
 3. the anagogical or symbolic sense and the use of hyperbole

St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (AD 354-430) wrote: "If we are perplexed by any apparent contradiction in Scripture, it is not allowable to say, the author of this book is mistaken; but either the manuscript is faulty, or the translation is wrong, or you have not understood." If you compare 2 Peter 2:1-3:3 and Peter's closing doxology with Jude verses 4-18, and Jude's doxology in verse 25, the two letters are very similar. The key to understanding the similarities is in the "they" in Jude 18b that refers to Peter and the other Apostles and the quote in verse 18 suggests Jude is actually referring to Peter's second letter in 3:3. The similarities can be accounted for by the fact that this was the voice of the Church, expressed in both letters and probably in homilies by St. Peter and others.

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| Second Letter of Peter 2:1-3:3, 18 | The Letter of Jude |
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| 2:1 <i>There were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you who will introduce destructive heresies and even deny the Master who ransomed them ...</i> | Verse 4: <i>For there have been some intruders, who long ago were designated for this condemnation, godless persons, who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and who deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.</i> |
| 2:4 <i>For if God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but condemned them to the chains of Tartarus and handed them over to be kept for judgment...</i> | Verse 6: <i>The angels too, who did not keep to their own domain but deserted their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains, in gloom, for the judgment of the great day.</i> |
| 2:6 ... <i>and if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction, reducing them to ashes...</i> | Verse 7: <i>Like Sodom and Gomorrah, and the surrounding towns, which in the same manner as they, indulged in sexual promiscuity and practiced unnatural vice, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.</i> |
| 2:10 ... <i>and especially those who follow the flesh with its depraved desire and show contempt for lordship.</i> | Verse 8: <i>Similarly, these dreamers nevertheless also defile the flesh, scorn lordship, and revile glorious beings.</i> |
| 2:11-12a ... <i>whereas angels, despite their superior strength and power, do not bring a reviling judgment against them from the Lord. But these people, like irrational animals born by nature for capture and destruction, revile things that they do not understand...</i> | Verses 9-10: <i>Yet the archangel Michael, when he argued with the devil in a dispute over the body of Moses, did not venture to pronounce a reviling judgment upon him but said, "May the Lord rebuke you!" But these people revile what they do not understand and are destroyed by what they know by nature like irrational animals.</i> |
| 2:14, 17 <i>Their eyes are full of adultery and insatiable for sin ... These people are waterless springs and mists driven by a gale...</i> | Verse 12: <i>These are blemishes on your love feasts, as they carouse fearlessly and look after themselves. They are waterless clouds blown about by winds, fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead and uprooted.</i> |
| 2:15 <i>Abandoning the straight road, they have gone astray, following the road of Balaam ...</i> | Verse 11: <i>Woe to them! They follow the way of Cain, abandoned themselves to Balaam's error for the sake of gain, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.</i> |
| 2:17b ... <i>for them the gloom of darkness has been reserved.</i> | Verses 13: <i>They are like wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shameless deeds, wandering stars for whom the gloom of darkness has been reserved forever.</i> |
| 2:18 <i>For, talking empty bombast, they seduce with licentious desires of the flesh those who have barely escaped from people who live in error.</i> | Verse 16: <i>These people are complainers, disgruntled ones who live by their desires; their mouths utter bombast as they fawn over people to gain advantage.</i> |
| 3:1-2 <i>This is now, beloved....to recall the words previously spoken by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your Apostles.</i> | Verse 17: <i>But you, beloved, remember the words spoken beforehand by the Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ ...</i> |
| 3:3 <i>Know this first of all, that in the last days scoffers will come to scoff, living according to their own desires...</i> | Verses 18b-19: <i>...for they told you, "In the last time there will be scoffers who will love according to their own godless desires." These are the ones who cause divisions; they lie on the natural plane, devoid of the Spirit.</i> |
| 3:18 <i>But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory now and to the day of eternity. Amen.</i> | Verse 25: <i>...to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord be glory, majesty, power, and authority from ages past, now, and for ages to come. Amen.</i> |
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