



1 and 2 Peter and Jude

One longer and two shorter epistles are closely related, although attributed to two different authors. They treat now familiar themes, but also engage in pointed criticism of dissenters, while encouraging recipients to remain faithful to their calling.

1 Peter

The first epistle of Peter offers pastoral advice and encouragement to a broad community of believers, described as "exiles of the dispersion" in various parts of Asia Minor, modern Turkey (1 Pet 1:1). The author is identified as Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ and also an "elder" or "presbyter" (5:1) who witnessed Christ's sufferings. He has written "through Silvanus" (5:12), a person known from Paul's letters (2 Cor 1:19; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1) and probably identical with the "Silas" mentioned in Acts 15:22–18:5. The letter is written in a relatively sophisticated Greek style, not what we would expect from a Galilean fisherman. Defenders of the authenticity of the letter suggest that the content may have been dictated by Peter while the stylistic presentation was the work of Silvanus.

Peter says that he is in "Babylon" (5:13), no doubt a symbol of Rome, where he is with his "son," Mark. This brief reference comports with the information of the second-century author, Papias, who reported that Mark wrote his gospel on the basis of Peter's teaching (Eusebius, *Church History* 3.39.15).

The situation of the addressees is one of persecution, a "fiery ordeal" meant to test them (4:12), in which they suffer "as Christians" (4:16) a designation that the Jesus movement received fairly early in its history (Acts 11:25). Such opposition may have come from various sources who disliked or distrusted the new movement. Official persecution in the first and second century was sporadic and local.

Framed by a formal greeting (1:1–2) and farewell (5:12–14) the epistle pursues four major themes, community defining holiness (1:3–2:10), life-governing order (2:11–3:12), encouragement to endure suffering (3:13–4:19), and a special exhortation to "elders" (5:1–11).

Peter's Doctrinal Teaching

The first segment of 1 Peter celebrates what God has done through Christ with a series of striking images. The opening summarizes the gospel that promises "new birth into a living hope" by Christ's resurrection (1:3). That hope focuses on "an inheritance, imperishable and undefiled" (1:4) of life with God in heaven. A celebratory tone pervades the summary of the gospel (1:8–9).

The author grounds this gospel of hope in Israel's scriptures, which he cites abundantly in what follows in their Greek translation. He begins with the summons of Leviticus 11:44 to "be holy as I am holy" (1:16). The human condition is summarized with a passage from Isaiah 40:6–7 declaring "all flesh is like grass" (1:24). The contrasting image of the holy community as a new temple with a new priesthood is grounded in a catena of citations heralding the cornerstone (2:6, Isa 28:16), which builders rejected (2:7, Ps 112:22), a "stumbling stone" for some (2:8, Isa 8:14). Built on this cornerstone is "royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (2:9, Exod 19:5–6; Isa 43:21). What was once not a people has been made one by God's mercy (2:10, Hos 1:6, 9; 2:26). In the hortatory section of the letter the author also deploys scripture effectively. Isaiah's famous passage on the suffering servant, which many scholars think inspires other texts about Christ, is quoted here, built into a reflection on Christ's atoning death that grounds his admonition to accept authority (2:21–24). The author is intimately familiar with Jewish scripture and uses it effectively to illustrate doctrine and support exhortation.

Central to the author's teaching is his reflection on what God accomplished in Christ, but he also maintains the common expectation that the end of all things is near (4:7). He also recognizes the presence of evil in the world, symbolized by the devil who like a roaring lion goes about looking for someone to devour (5:8). The apocalyptic heritage of the early Jesus movement is still alive here.

Peter's Moral Exhortation

The author admonishes that his addressees be respectable to the wider society. They are to behave honorably among the Gentiles (2:12) and must be ready to defend and explain their faith (3:15). They should also be respectful of authority, fearing God and honoring the emperor (2:17). A large segment of the exhortation treats the expectations for people in specific social positions. This form of admonition, known as a Household Code, is found frequently in the epistles treated in this Bible study. The author tells slaves to accept authority (2:18), women to be subject to their husbands (3:1–6) while husbands should honor their wives (3:7), while all should strive for unity of spirit and mutual love (3:8), for love "covers a multitude of sins" (4:8). While few would object to the exhortations to unit and love, some of these other particular admonitions, perhaps understandable as Christianity spread in the Roman world, have had a problematic history. Many would view them today as part of the Church's history of adapting to new social circumstances, but hardly as straightforward advice for contemporary Christians.

Jude and 2 Peter

Early Christians debated whether Jude and 2 Peter should be considered authoritative. That matter was not decided until the determination of the 27-book canon of the New Testament in the late fourth century. Jude, the shorter of the two pieces, probably served as the source for 2 Peter. Its author describes himself as a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, whose identity is not obvious. Several disciples named Jude (or Judas) appear in the New Testament, including a brother of Jesus (Matt 13:55; Mark 6:3), who would also be the brother of James, who is probably the author of the Epistle of James. Having that kind of family tie might explain why this epistle was valued, whether the authorship was real or fictive.

Like other Catholic epistles Jude is addressed to a general body of Greek-speaking recipients, "those who are called, those who believe" (Jude 1). It offers a brief polemical reflection on a situation of controversy occasioned by "certain intruders" who "pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (4). Who exactly these people are is not at all clear. They might be proto-Gnostics or other "heterodox" teachers of one sort or another, but what precisely they taught is not evident. What follows is a

tirade against these teachers, invoking an array of negative Biblical exemplars, unfaithful Israelites, fallen angels, Sodom and Gemorrah (5–7), Cain, Balaam, Korah (11). These teachers are compared to "blemishes on your love-feasts ... waterless clouds ... wild waves ... wandering stars" (12–13). In support of his critique, the author invokes a Jewish pseudepigraphical text, *1 Enoch* (14), a fact that raised questions about Jude's own orthodoxy! The author assures his addressees that troubles from such figures have been foreseen and should be expected and that they should prepare themselves by building their own faith and love and showing mercy even to those whom they despise (17–23).

2 Peter, which styles itself a "testament" of Peter (2 Pet 1:12–15), builds on the celebratory prose of 1 Peter, to which it alludes (3:1), and on Jude's polemic against heterodox teachers, but it adds a specific reference to what is at stake. Within its epistolary frame with introduction (1:1–2) and final word of praise (3:18) it offers a celebration of what "the divine power has given us" (1:3–11). The author insists, perhaps too much, on his own authority and his intend to admonish his addressees (1:12–18). He reminds them that scriptural prophecy needs interpretation (1:19–21), suggesting what the source of the problem might be. Then, using Jude's rhetoric, he denounces false prophets (2:1–22), although he adds references to God's salvific actions with Noah (2:5) and Lot (2:7). He finally makes clear that what is at stake is eschatological hope (3:1–13). Although the second coming of Christ has not taken place, the addressees can be assured that prophecies about that event are reliable. After all, one day is like a thousand years for the Lord (3:8). Invoking contemporary Stoic cosmology, he notes that there will be final dissolution on the day of the Lord (3:10). There will be a new heaven and a new earth (3:13).

2 Peter's final remarks (3:14–17) make explicit reference to the Pauline letter collection and notes that "there are some things there hard to understand" (3:16), an opinion that many readers share.