

F R O M

The Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary

COMMENTARY ON
1-2 PETER
AND JUDE

Stephen Motyer
and Peter H. Davids

General Editors: Gary M. Burge
and Andrew E. Hill

THE BAKER
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COMMENTARY

Gary M. Burge and Andrew E. Hill, eds.

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1-2 PETER
and JUDE

Stephen Motyer
Peter H. Davids



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Abbreviations

<i>ANET</i>	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> . Edited by J. B. Pritchard. 3rd ed. Princeton, 1969
BDAG	Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3rd ed. Chicago, 1999
ca.	circa (about, approximately)
cf.	compare
chap(s).	chapter(s)
<i>COS</i>	<i>The Context of Scripture</i> . Edited by W. W. Hallo. 3 vols. Leiden, 1997–
e.g.	for example
ESV	English Standard Version
<i>HALOT</i>	Koehler, L., W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm. <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. 5 vols. Leiden, 1994–2000
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
i.e.	that is
KJV	King James Version
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NET	New English Translation
NIV	New International Version (2011 edition)
NIV 1984	New International Version (1984 edition)
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NJPS	<i>The Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text</i>
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren. Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E. Green. 8 vols. Grand Rapids, 1974–
TNIV	Today's New International Version

1 Peter

STEPHEN MOTYER

Outline

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Introduction

Audience and Occasion

Peter's first letter is called a "General Epistle" in that it was written not to one person or church but to all the churches greeted in 1:1. The precise regions listed are uncertain, for the terms could refer either to the Roman provinces so named or to the old ethnic groups and their associated areas, from which the Romans later adopted their official province names. It is most likely that the names are being used in their "official" sense, so the letter was probably addressed to all the churches in the northern half of Asia Minor (modern Turkey).

It is clear that Peter's readers were facing persecution for their faith, and this has occasioned debate among scholars on several counts. Who instigated this persecution, and why? Was it official or unofficial? Was the persecution merely a threat, or was it already a reality? The answers to these questions are not easy to determine, but the following seems to be most likely. The persecution was probably unofficial and local, instigated by pagan neighbors of the Christian believers, perhaps with the support of minor local officials. It was certainly a present reality for some, if not all, of Peter's readers. While the Roman Empire had an ambivalent attitude toward Christianity, and persecution was occasionally launched officially, this was rare compared with spasmodic local outbursts of hatred. And in this letter, the reasons given for the persecution are purely local. Peter mentions, for example, the annoyance caused by the Christians' refusal to join in riotous festivals (4:4).

Because of this setting, 1 Peter has been called "the Job of the New Testament"—the New Testament book that handles the theme of suffering most directly and intensely.



Authorship and Date

Few scholars today hold that the letter was actually written by the apostle Peter, largely on the grounds of style and language. First Peter is one of the finest examples of Greek prose in the New Testament, and scholars argue that Peter, who was an “unschooled” fisherman (Acts 4:13), could not possibly have produced such a work. In addition, the letter shows close affinities with Paul’s writings, particularly the Letter to the Romans, and this too weighs against Petrine authorship. Alternative suggestions are that Silas drafted it as Peter’s secretary (see 5:12), so that the style is his but the substance Peter’s, or that it was written by another individual after Peter’s death and then attributed to him out of respect for his memory.

Yet why should it have been impossible for Peter to compose a letter in Greek? Growing up in Galilee, Peter would have spoken both Greek and Aramaic. And if the letter was written from Rome, as 5:13 suggests, the influence of the Letter to the Romans is hardly surprising. The ascription to Peter is universal in the manuscript tradition and attested early by the church fathers.

Granted Peter's authorship, this letter was probably written from Rome toward the end of his life, perhaps in AD 64–65, when the persecution under the emperor Nero was looming, or had already broken out.



An icon of Peter from a larger piece entitled *Christ and Twelve Apostles* (Antalya, Turkey, nineteenth century AD) [Copyright © Baker Photo Archive. Courtesy of the Antalya Museum, Turkey.]

Commentary

1. Suffering as a Christian (1:1–2:10)

A. The hidden inheritance, the hidden Lord (1:1–9). Peter begins his letter like any other in the world of his day, with a greeting, a prayer, and an expression of thanks. But his delight at the wonderful message he has to impart is so great that, like Paul, he fills out these bare, formal “bones” with the glories of the Christian gospel.

He is not simply Peter, but an apostle who writes with the authority of Jesus Christ. His recipients are not just the Christians of northern Asia Minor, but God’s elect, whose earthly address is only temporary. His prayer is not the usual “peace be yours in abundance” (see Dan. 4:1), but includes “grace.” Instead of the usual expression of thanks for something quite ordinary, like the good health of his recipients, Peter launches into a shout of thanks and praise to God for all the heavenly blessings he has stored up for those who are his.

The themes of this opening greeting and doxology set the tone for the whole letter. Peter brings up the three persons of the Trinity before us again in the very next section (1:10–21) and thus picks up the trinitarian blessing of verse 2. But this opening section is particularly balanced by 2:4–10, which brings to a close the first part of the letter. There Peter returns to the theme that above all thrills him here: the hidden things that are gloriously true of his readers even if all the world should shout a different message at them. Whether they feel like it or not, they are a royal priesthood, a holy nation (2:9).

Doubtless they felt more like his description of them in his greeting (1:1): “strangers in the world” (NIV 1984), “scattered,” tiny, persecuted congregations spread across the huge expanse of half of Asia Minor, struggling to keep their faith alive against the pressure of a vastly pagan

environment. But Peter will not let them dwell on what they look like from the world's point of view. He wants them to see how *God* looks at them. And from God's viewpoint, their scatteredness is his election. God has plucked them out of their paganism to be his own (1:1). He has foreknown them (1:2). Before they ever existed, the Father knew and loved them and made them his. God has sent his Spirit to sanctify them—that is, precisely to create the distinction between them and the world that causes them so much trouble, by leading them into a life of obedience to Jesus Christ, sheltered under the forgiveness won by his blood.

At the moment they are facing all kinds of trials (1:6) and are tempted to hopelessness and despair. But here too Peter will not let them—or us—believe what the eye sees. The reality is unseen: there is an inheritance that can never perish, which is kept in heaven for us (1:4), as a result of Jesus's resurrection and our new birth through him (1:3). And there is no possibility of losing it, for however weak we may feel, we are shielded by God's power until the moment of salvation comes. Our present experiences are all preparatory, making us fit for glory. Jesus too is unseen: but even so, with our eyes fixed on hidden realities, we will love him and our hearts will sparkle with a joy that surpasses language and even now partakes of the glory that is yet to be (1:8). We already hear the strains of heavenly praise and share in heavenly joy, because we are already “receiving . . . the salvation of your souls” (1:9), even in the midst of suffering and pain.

These inspiring opening verses contain the whole message of 1 Peter in a nutshell. The rest of the letter unpacks and applies this vision in greater and more practical detail.

B. Preparation for action (1:10–2:3). The exhortation of 1:13 provides the keynote of this section, as Peter tackles the unspoken question, How can I have a faith like that? He mentions faith four times in 1:3–9, and it would be very possible for an oppressed, isolated believer to feel that the faith described is too high to attain. Peter sets out in this section to show what the roots of such a faith are—and it turns out that the way we think is absolutely vital.

Peter's sudden introduction of “the prophets” (1:10–12)—probably shorthand for the whole Old Testament—is at first sight surprising. But there are two excellent reasons for their appearance. First, the prophets back up what Peter writes about the foreknowledge of God the Father in 1:2. God announced centuries ago his intention to save the followers of Jesus. It was

in fact the Spirit of Christ who spoke in the prophets (1:11). Second, from the prophets we can learn the Christian faith, which Peter has just so eloquently and movingly summarized. Even though they wrote long before Christ came, they realized that they were writing about a grace to be given to someone else and eagerly sought to learn about the time and circumstances of its coming, the sufferings of the Christ, and his glories. The prophets became aware that they were writing for someone else, so that the gospel only needed to be “announced” (NIV “told,” 1:12) when the time came. The prophets had already testified to it. See how Paul puts the same idea in Romans 15:4 and 1 Corinthians 10:11.

This is tremendously important for Peter. His letter contains no fewer than twenty-five direct quotations from the Old Testament, and many allusions to it besides. It is the basis of the Christian gospel, for without it we would not understand Christ. And so, in practice, a mind well fed by the Scriptures is the basic prerequisite for the experience of joy in suffering described in 1:3–9.

The existence of such a prophetic word is a summons to prepare the mind for action (1:13–21). The proper response to the Scriptures is to get thinking. The Greek for “minds that are alert and fully sober” means “make sure you keep all your faculties fully operational” (Peter repeats the exhortation “be alert and of sober mind” in 4:7 and 5:8). The mind that is girded up, redirected by the Scriptures, will begin to think in a new way.

However threatening the present, the fully girded-up mind will set its hope “perfectly” or “fully” on God’s grace. The redirected mind will focus on God’s priority, holiness. At its heart holiness means separateness: God calls us to be different, because he is different. Peter’s readers must not worry about their distinctiveness that provokes such hostility from others. It is inevitable! If we are God’s, we will begin to bear his likeness in every aspect of life.

The renewed mind knows that life will end with judgment (1:17). We must therefore live each moment under the scrutiny of the judge. We may rejoice to know God as Father, but there must also be reverent fear. Every moment matters, eternally. The thought that we are to be judged according to our work could lead to despair; but our eternal salvation is not jeopardized by our moral feebleness. It rests on nothing that we can produce, not even on our silver and gold (1:18): even our best perishes before God’s judgment. But our salvation rests on “the precious blood of

Christ” (1:19), just as the blood of the Passover lamb saved the Israelites. Christ was chosen (literally “foreknown”) before the foundation of the world (1:20): it was no sudden whim on God’s part that made him the sacrifice for sin. And as a result we may place sure faith and hope in God, who though our judge is also our Savior and Father. The resurrection seals the security of those who so believe and hope (1:21). In the midst of earthly insecurity, *here* is true confidence and security!

How may we be sure of knowing joy in suffering? In the next two paragraphs, Peter picks up what he wrote about the prophetic word in 1:10–12 and applies it practically: if our hearts and lives are truly being fed by the word of God, then we will be increasingly transformed within.

First, the word of God gives new life (1:22–25). When we obey God’s truth, love will be born in us. God’s word has a vital, life-giving power because of who speaks it. Peter quotes Isaiah 40:6–8, which contrasts the permanence of God’s word with the transitory nature of all earthly life. The gospel that Peter’s readers have heard, and the Scriptures they now read, are alike “the word of the living and lasting God” (1:23; in the Greek, “living and enduring” could also describe the word rather than God; see NIV).

Second, the word of God nourishes new life (2:1–3). Every newborn infant needs a healthy appetite and proper food or it will not grow. The pure “spiritual” milk that will produce healthy Christian growth is God’s own word.

C. The hidden spiritual house (2:4–10). Peter began his letter with the themes of God’s elect and his mercy (1:1, 3). He ends this first section on the same note (2:9–10). He also returns to his central theme of hiddenness, though his treatment is different here. In 1:3–9 his thought was angled entirely toward the future, to the coming inheritance and the coming Lord, both now veiled, yet objects of love and joy. But now Peter turns to the past and the present. The hidden but coming Lord was rejected by humankind (2:4), who did not see the estimation God placed on him. In their present rejection, therefore, Peter’s readers are sharing the fate of Jesus himself. He was like the stone the builders rejected (2:7).

Through this paragraph, Peter continues his focus on Scripture by quoting three “stone” passages that were applied to Jesus from a very early date (the tradition seems, in fact, to originate with Jesus himself; Matt. 21:42); Psalm 118:22–23; Isaiah 8:14; 28:16 (cf. Rom. 9:33). A stone can look most unimpressive—but it can perform a vital function if made the

cornerstone of a large building; or it can bring a person tumbling to the ground if he or she trips over it. Jesus has become the cornerstone of God's spiritual temple, and there are two possible responses. We can either take our own angle and position from the cornerstone and line ourselves up on him, or we can refuse to live by reference to him and stumble over him instead. It is a vivid picture.

Peter urges his readers to see that they are being built in line with Christ: sharing all the angles of his life, experiencing his rejection as well as his glory. His opponents stumble fatally, but those joined to Christ are a chosen people, a royal priesthood (2:9), contrary to all appearances. In verses 9 and 10 Peter piles up phrases from the Old Testament (Exod. 19:6; Isa. 42:12; 43:20; Hos. 1:10; 2:23) to show how all that is true of God's chosen covenant people is true for those who believe in Jesus, however rejected and weak they may seem.

2. At Home, but Not in This World (2:11–3:12)

In the second section of his letter, Peter tackles the question that arises at the end of the first. If Christians must reckon themselves to be gloriously different from what they *appear* to be, if they must look beyond their scatteredness and suffering and see themselves as God's chosen people, then what should their attitude be toward their earthly circumstances? Peter's readers must have been tempted to respond to persecution by adopting an antiworld attitude and withdrawing as much as possible into the comforting warmth of Christian fellowship.

But Peter will not let them do this, even though he has underlined so powerfully their new and hidden status as God's people and the life and love that binds them. Withdrawal from the world is not an option for Christians. Rather, their difference must be expressed through the distinctiveness of their life *within* their earthly callings.

A. The Christian's inner life (2:11–12). In verse 11 Peter reaffirms the general attitude toward the world that ran through the first section of his letter. His readers are "foreigners and exiles" in the world; their home and their roots are elsewhere. It is natural, therefore, that he should go on to urge them to abstain from sinful (literally "fleshly") desires. This world is not our true home, and the flesh seeks to stifle the life of the Spirit within us.

However, although we may be citizens of another world, we still have to “live . . . among the pagans” (2:12) and do so in a way that testifies clearly to the existence and power of that new world. Our declaration depends not so much on words (Peter is remarkably silent about verbal witnessing), as on behavior. Non-Christians watch what we do. The word translated “see” means to watch over a period of time, implying prolonged observation. We must see to it that, even though we may be mocked (or apparently disregarded), the evidence of our lives will speak so loudly that, on the day of judgment, non-Christians will glorify God because they will have to concede that the testimony was laid before them quite unambiguously, even if they failed to heed it. What we are on the inside (2:11) will become obvious on the outside (2:12).

B. A life of submission (2:13–3:7). Romans 13:1–7 is a close parallel to 2:13–17. Paul and Peter agree that respect for and obedience to worldly authority are important because they are an expression of *God’s* authority. Peter begins and ends by mentioning the Roman emperor as the one who embodies all the different forms of secular authority under which Christians find themselves.

In theory, worldly authorities exist “to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right” (2:14; cf. Rom. 13:3–4), but Peter is as aware as we are today of the possibility of corruption in high places. He even calls Rome “Babylon” in his closing greeting (5:13). Yet, just as we abstain from fleshly desires and still remain committed to ordinary human society (2:11–12), so we submit to worldly authority even though it is to pass away under the judgment of God. We know that God’s world is fallen, but we submit to his ordering of it, keen to testify by our lives to what is to come. Simply by doing good we might silence (literally “muzzle”) people inclined to revile us (2:15). Peter emphasizes this by the verbs he uses in verse 17. The proper attitudes are timely respect for all people (i.e., we are to take every opportunity to show honor to fellow men and women), love for fellow believers, fear of God (full devotion of heart, mind, and soul), and continuing respect for the emperor.

Peter next homes in on a group for whom a very particular application of the principle of submission to authority is necessary: slaves (2:18–25). Unrest among slaves was widespread at this time, and undoubtedly some Christian slaves believed that, having been “bought” by Christ, they had been set free from their earthly masters! Later on, there were actually

Christian groups that encouraged slaves to run away from their masters on these very grounds. But Peter will not allow it. The same principle of *nonwithdrawal from the world* means that slaves must not stop being slaves but instead become better ones—even when their masters are harsh. If they suffer, they must make sure that they suffer unjustly, because it will not do their Lord credit if they deserve the beatings they get!



A Roman woman with braided hair (early second century AD). First Peter 3:3 exhorts

women not to adorn themselves with such elaborate hairstyles, as do pagan women.

[Copyright © Giovanni Dall'Orto / Wikimedia. Courtesy of the National Archaeological Museum, Athens.]

Then Peter attaches to this straightforward teaching a marvelous passage about the servant Jesus (2:21–25). In fact, it is likely that this is an adaptation of an early Christian hymn about Christ. It suits Peter's theme beautifully as, in close dependence on Isaiah 53, it describes how Jesus, the Suffering Servant of the Lord, submitted to suffering in this world because of his obedience to his heavenly master. Belonging to his Lord did not deliver him from suffering but led him straight to it. And through his suffering we have found forgiveness (2:24). To suffer, therefore, is simply to walk in his footsteps (2:21), and we can be sure that, whatever happens, he is a caring shepherd (2:25).

Peter has deliberately placed this hymn in the middle of this section so that it has a central place: Jesus is our example, not just in the way he suffered, but in his obedient submission to the powers of this world.

The zoom lens now focuses in on another, still more intimate relationship from which Christians were tempted to withdraw because of their new, otherworldly faith: marriage (3:1–7). Should Christian husbands or wives leave their partners if they do not share their faith? Again, some Christians answered yes. But Peter insists that they should not. He devotes more space to wives (3:1–6) because they could more easily be made to suffer from their husbands than vice versa. He eloquently teaches that the greatest beauty is that of character and that the loveliness of Christian character speaks far more powerfully than a hundred sermons. The word “see” in verse 2 is the same as that in 2:12, implying extended observation. The incident in mind in verse 6 is probably that of Genesis 12:11–20, where Sarah submits to some very unkind treatment from her husband, and in that context her beauty is emphasized. Abraham tried the same trick again later (Genesis 20), insisting that Sarah must show her love for him in this improper way, and she again submits. (She calls him “lord” in Gen. 18:12.) The Christian calling is patient submission to suffering within the structures of this world.

What about the Christian husband with the unbelieving wife? Verse 7 summarizes it beautifully. No separation! Even if they cannot share on the deepest spiritual level, they are still together “heirs . . . of the gracious gift of life” (i.e., ordinary human existence). The husband must show all the respect and care due to a weaker partner; and in so doing his own bond with the Lord will not be weakened.

It is vital to bear in mind the first-century cultural setting of 3:1–7. The normal expectation was that, if the male head of a household changed his religion, the whole household would follow (see Acts 16:31–34). It was strongly against this culture for a wife to change her religion apart from her husband. This helps us to see that Peter is not telling wives to be all-accepting doormats here. They have already stepped out and become different by believing in Christ for themselves. Now they must show that their “rebellion” deepens their love.

Similarly, a man becoming a Christian would have a culturally endorsed right to expect his wife to believe too. But in verse 7 Peter remarkably tells Christian husbands not to insist on this. Their wives must have the freedom *not* to believe! That’s what honoring them demands.

C. The Christian’s corporate life (3:8–12). “Everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35): this is the principle underlying these verses, with which Peter summarizes the whole section. Christians treasure their fellowship with one another. When they are faced with persecution, their common joy in their Lord becomes all the more precious. But Peter wants to impress on them that their relationship with each other is not entirely inward-looking. People will notice what they say to each other about the injustices they suffer (3:9). Consequently, the Lord must be their model. The quotation from Psalm 34:12–16 in verses 10–12 contains the key word of this entire section: “Do good.” It also highlights the use of the tongue, just as the end of the last section did (2:9; see also 2:1): the way we speak will reveal the shape of our whole life.

3. Suffering—The Road to Glory (3:13–4:19)

In this section Peter focuses more precisely on the subject of suffering. The last section laid down the basic principle of submission to the structures of this world. Peter now shows how suffering fits into that submission. Once again, this section begins and ends on the same note:

doing good (a favorite theme of Peter's) and suffering for God's sake or for what is right.

A. Suffering for doing good (3:13–22). These verses are among the most difficult in the whole New Testament, because Peter refers to traditions and stories obviously familiar to his readers, but unfortunately not to us. Yet the overall message is clear. Peter tells us that if we are called to suffer for what is right, we must look to Jesus, who suffered for our sins and through that suffering has come to a place of supreme authority, raised over all the powers of evil that seem so overwhelming to the persecuted Asian Christians. Jesus suffered, though he was righteous, and if we will now set apart Christ as Lord in our hearts and follow in his footsteps, we can be delivered from the fear of our persecutors, confident that through suffering we will share his victory. In the meantime we must bear witness to our hope by both word and deed, remembering that our baptism was our pledge to God, to live with good consciences before him.

Peter shares with Paul, and early Christians generally, the belief that authority and power in this world are earthly expressions of unseen fallen spiritual entities. Therefore, submission to secular authority as well as submission to all the constraints of earthly existence is a form of bondage to the powers of evil. Having told us to submit, Peter must touch on the spiritual implications of his teaching.

The “imprisoned spirits” (3:19) are not the souls of dead human beings but fallen angels (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). According to Jewish tradition (1 *Enoch* 6–20), they deceived and corrupted the generation who lived before the flood, teaching them the arts of sin (see Gen. 6:1–4). As a result they were locked up in prison at the time of the flood, “to be held for judgment” (2 Pet. 2:4). They were the counterparts of the angels, authorities, and powers (3:22) still active today.

Jesus's preaching to these spirits was not an offer of salvation but a proclamation of his victory—in fact, the announcement of the judgment hanging over them. The spiritual forces behind the greatest corruption the world has ever seen have received their final condemnation at Jesus's hands! Having dealt with them, he finished his journey to heaven and took his place at God's right hand, in full authority over the powers behind the suffering experienced by Peter's readers. However much they may feel themselves to be victims, Christ is the victor!

The refusal of the angels to submit to their Creator was matched by the mockery of Noah's contemporaries, who did not respond to God's warning of impending judgment given by Noah's preaching (cf. 2 Pet. 2:5) and by the slow construction of the ark miles from the sea (3:20). The water in which they died was, paradoxically, the very medium of Noah's salvation. In this respect the flood foreshadows Christian baptism, for that too pictures death but leads to life. When they were baptized, Peter's readers pledged themselves to live for God and embraced the hope of resurrection through Jesus Christ. But in so doing they actually brought suffering upon themselves, just as Noah did by his obedience to God's command to build an ark and to warn his generation. Yet in their suffering, symbolized by their baptismal "death," they follow the path already trodden by their Savior on the way to glory.

Peter thus seeks to minister to his suffering brethren in the deepest possible way: not by simply pointing them to compensation in the world to come, nor by painting vividly the judgment in store for their enemies, but by showing them that, *precisely in their suffering*, already pictured in the baptism that united them with Christ, they are sharing with their Lord in his victory over all the powers of evil in the universe.

B. Living for God (4:1–11). There is no break in the flow of thought at 4:1. Although Noah is not mentioned in 4:1–6, we will best grasp Peter's meaning if we keep him in mind. For what Peter says in essence in verses 3–5 is, "You are in the same position as Noah, who refused to join in the profligate and licentious behavior of his contemporaries, even though they thought him peculiar for his refusal. Hold yourselves aloof from such practices, for God is about to act in judgment now as he did then." Peter actually uses the word "flood" in verse 4, where a literal translation would be "they curse you when you don't join the same flood of dissipation." The outpourings of vice around them are horribly reminiscent of the flood of God's wrath about to break.

It is especially helpful to read the difficult verse 6 with the story of Noah in mind. Noah was revered as a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5), and by "the dead" Peter is probably referring to the people who died in the flood, the "dead" who ignored Noah's passionate message about the coming judgment. Who knows what God's purpose may have been? Yes, they died in the flood; but those waters symbolized baptism, because baptism is

likewise about doing away with the flesh. Who knows whether their death in the flood might not have been a baptism for them, an entry into life?

Peter has his readers' persecutors in mind as he writes this. They may heap abuse on the Christians (4:4), but no one is so far gone as to be beyond the reach of God's life-giving power. They, too, could "live in the Spirit as God does" (4:6 NRSV) because of the faithful, suffering witness of the believers, who lovingly live and speak in God, as Noah did.

The basic principle holds true for all: "Whoever suffers in the body [literally "in the flesh"] is done with sin" (4:1). This was supremely true for Christ, who through death has conquered sin in all its manifestations; it is necessarily true for his followers, who through their suffering learn to dethrone evil desires and live for the will of God (4:2); and possibly it is even true for the persecutors of the church, who might come to life through the judgment of death and must therefore be the objects of patient testimony, in word and deed.

The flood was a partial judgment, a foreshadowing of the total winding up, which is now near. If Noah prepared with such diligence for the flood, how much more should we seek to be ready for the end (4:7–11)? Peter outlines the vital features of a life lived with an eye to the coming judgment.

In the privacy of heart and home, Christians need minds that think straight and hearts that pray straight. In ordinary social relationships, Christians must love one another and offer hospitality. In undertaking Christian ministry, each must put into active service whatever gift God's grace has bestowed, whether it is teaching or more practical forms of service. The believer must draw on God's resources and provision, and not for personal gain or glory. Rather, the object of life this side of the end must be the praise of God.

C. Sharing the sufferings of Christ (4:12–19). In this final subsection, Peter draws together the threads. His readers must not be surprised at the painful (literally "fiery") trial they are experiencing, because suffering is not something foreign as far as Christians are concerned. Rather, it lies at the very heart of our existence. Peter gives three reasons why we should not be surprised.

First, we are participating in the sufferings of Christ (4:13). We must expect to receive the same treatment as our master, simply because we are his servants (John 15:20). Suffering is woven into human experience as part

of a fallen creation, but Jesus has blasted a way through death to eternal life. And so we should rejoice as we participate in this great saving movement, looking ahead to glory!

Second, because Jesus is already victorious, our suffering is a foretaste of that coming glory, a blessedness that comes to us as God's Spirit rests on us. What a revolutionary understanding!

Finally, our sufferings are the opening phase of God's winding-up operation, the beginning of his judgment. Peter deliberately calls the tribulation "judgment," partly for theological reasons (because he understands all suffering and death as part of the curse laid by God on a fallen world), but also because he will not let his readers relax their guard. Their suffering is a trial (4:12), and they must make sure that they do not suffer deservedly (4:15)! But if we suffer according to God's will (4:19; i.e., with our hearts set on God's will, even in the midst of our suffering), then God will uphold us.

4. Final Exhortations and Greetings (5:1–14)

The final chapter begins with a resounding "therefore," which both NIV and NRSV have failed to translate. This makes the connection clear: in times of suffering and trial, special responsibility rests on the leaders of the churches to support and be shepherds of God's flock (5:2). Peter turns to this vital practical concern to round off his letter. But in fact his concern is not just pastoral, for there remains a theological question, raised by what he has said about submission to earthly powers and Christ's victory over them, which needs to be tackled as well. If, as he has told us, we must submit to earthly authorities even though Christ has proclaimed his victory over them, if we must continue to live as loyal citizens of Babylon (5:13) even though we know her satanic power has been broken, then what about authority structures within the church? What kinds of leadership and submission are appropriate for those who are already touched by the glory of the coming age?

Peter's pastoral concern predominates in 5:1–5. His self-designation in verse 1 hints at this deeper concern. He is a "fellow elder" (NRSV omits this)—not an exalted apostle—and with them a witness of (better, "to") Christ's sufferings. He therefore enters into all that that means, sharing

those sufferings himself and thus participating in the glory to be revealed. His readers are not alone in their suffering. Peter stands beside them.

He urges the elders to be aware of their special responsibility as shepherds. The imperative has an urgency about it—get on with the job! Then in three pairs of balancing phrases (“not . . . but,” 5:2–3) Peter tells them how they should exercise their pastoral care as far as *inner motivation* (“not because you must, but because you are willing”) and *outward incentive* (“not pursuing dishonest gain”) are concerned.

With the third “not . . . but” (5:3), Peter’s second theological concern surfaces clearly. He uses here the same word that Mark records Jesus as having used when discussing this very issue with his disciples (Mark 10:42–43). Even if the church seems to possess a conventional, earthly authority structure, it actually reverses the normal pattern, modeling its vertical relationships on the Son of Man, who “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life” (Mark 10:45). This is the style of leadership that will bring the full realization of the glory known now but in part (5:4). Peter drives this point home beautifully in verse 5 by using the single word “likewise” (NIV “in the same way”). He implies that the young men must be submissive to the “elders” in the same way as the elders are submissive to the young men! On both sides there is a “submission” that recognizes the distinctive gifts and ministry of the other and seeks to serve for Christ’s sake. Verse 5b puts it in a nutshell: they must all tie humility around them like a robe, so that they may enjoy God’s grace in all their relationships. For God himself does not lord it over his creatures, but by his grace reaches out to us and suffers with us, in Christ.



A modern Middle Eastern shepherd leading his sheep. First Peter 5:2 encourages the church elders to be “shepherds of God’s flock” so that they will be rewarded when the Chief Shepherd appears (5:4).

Now Peter summarizes everything that he desires for his readers (5:6–11). Here is the framework on which he wants the house of our Christian life to be founded. For all that he has urged us to submit to our earthly circumstances, however trying, it is really to God himself that we submit (5:6), in hope of his deliverance. We humble ourselves before him not as before an earthly master, awaiting instructions, but so as to feel the burden of anxiety lifted from our shoulders (5:7)!

His readers may be consumed with anxiety about their earthly enemies, but Peter tells them that the spiritual foe is far more deadly (5:8–9). And we

feel his pressure on us not just through our earthly trials but especially through the temptation not to face those trials with faith.

For all our seeking of stability and strength in this life, Peter reminds us in his closing blessing (5:10–11) that these are things that God reserves for the age to come. After the suffering of this age, in which we already trace his grace, he will finally complete us, strengthen us, and set us on a sure foundation.

In his final greeting, Peter associates with himself not just his two closest helpers, Silas and Mark, but also the whole church to which he belongs. “Babylon” (5:13) is almost certainly a reference to Rome, which was increasingly called “Babylon” by both Jews and Christians at this time. Using this term here fits beautifully with Peter’s theme. It reminds us of the true (satanic) nature of secular power. Christ, however, has conquered it. But also—and more particularly, at this point—it reminds us of the place of Israel’s exile and of the fact that we too are aliens and strangers in the world. The letter thus ends on the same note with which it began, when Peter saluted his readers as God’s elect, strangers in the world, scattered. For though exiles, we are yet God’s chosen, his elect people, destined for glory.

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2 Peter

PETER H. DAVIDS

Outline

1. Salutation (1:1–2)
2. Opening Statement (1:3–11)
3. Purpose Statement (1:12–15)
4. Arguments in Support of His Position (1:16–3:13)
 - A. Apostolic Eyewitness (1:16–18)
 - B. Prophetic Witness (1:19–21)
 - C. Certainty of Judgment (2:1–10a)
 - D. Denunciation of the False Teachers (2:10b–22)
 - E. Recapitulation and Introduction of the Second Part of the Argument (3:1–2)
 - F. Mockers Shown to Be Illogical (3:3–7)
 - G. Delay of the Still Certain Final Judgment (3:8–13)
5. Final Encouragement to Stability (3:14–18)

Introduction

Authorship, Audience, and Date

The Letter of 2 Peter had a more difficult time joining the canon than did any other New Testament letter. It was disputed into the fourth century, mainly due to its significant differences in style and methodology from 1 Peter, and perhaps due to its very Greek way of expressing ideas. Both issues made it difficult for third- and fourth-century church leaders to believe that 2 Peter was actually written by Peter.

Second Peter states that it was written by “Simon Peter” who is an “apostle of Jesus Christ,” Simon being Peter’s actual name and Peter, or “Rock,” being the nickname Jesus gave to him. Given that we have only one other letter attributed to Peter, that the authorship of this letter is also disputed (although not as hotly as that of 2 Peter), and that we do not know much about the early life and education of Peter, there is no body of literature against which we can test this claim of authorship nor sufficient information about Peter to indicate whether or not he could have written the letter. What we do have is what the letter reveals about the author, which is the data from which scholars draw their conclusions.



The author of 2 Peter is very much at home with the Greek language, for he has at least some secondary rhetorical education (the letter is written in the “grand style” associated with the rhetoric of Asia Minor rather than the

simpler style of Attic rhetoric), and with Greek philosophy, for he appears to be opposing some type of Epicurean influence and he uses Greek concepts expertly (e.g., 2 Peter 1:3–11). The author is also very much at home with the Letter of Jude, for he incorporates an edited version of most of that letter into 2 Peter 2:1–3:7. This, of course, means that he is writing after Jude and is the first witness to the existence of Jude. Given his use of Jude, the author is also familiar with stories that originated in the Old Testament. Yet, like Jude, he does not show that he knows these stories directly from the Old Testament but rather in the form in which they circulated in Second Temple Jewish literature (e.g., the book of *Jubilees*).



Extrabiblical stories referred to in 2 Peter were known to first-century Jews from texts like the book of *Jubilees*. The Hebrew version of *Jubilees* exists today only in fragments, such as the ones shown here (Qumran, second century BC). [Copyright ©

Baker Photo Archive. Courtesy of the Jordan Archaeological Museum, Amman.]

Our author seems to be writing to Gentile believers in Jesus, not to Jewish believers. In this, 2 Peter is similar to 1 Peter. While these first recipients are familiar with stories that modern Christians know from the Old Testament, this group of ancient auditors (“auditors,” or “hearers,”

because the majority of the recipients would never read the book but rather hear the book read to them as if it were a sermon) does not seem to have been as widely acquainted with Second Temple Jewish literature as that of Jude, for 2 Peter edits both the direct quotation of *1 Enoch* and the story taken from the *Testament of Moses* out of the material he takes from Jude. We know that these recipients have received a previous letter from the same author (2 Pet. 3:1), but that letter is not necessarily 1 Peter. As Paul shows, New Testament authors could write numerous letters, many of which have not been preserved. The believing community that the auditors are members of is old enough that the missionaries who founded it (“your apostles”; 2 Pet. 3:2) are no longer there, having either moved on or died. It is also old enough that it was possible for believers to be taunted with the question, “Where is this ‘coming’ he [Jesus] promised?” (3:4).

Assuming that *1 Clement* does in fact refer to 2 Peter (which can be debated), 2 Peter must have been written before AD 96. It had to be written before the *Apocalypse of Peter* (dated AD 110–40), for that work uses 2 Peter. Simon Peter was probably martyred before AD 68 (the death of Nero), so the question one must answer is whether the letter could have been written this early and, if so, whether it was the type of letter that a person like Simon Peter would have or could have written.

Structure and Occasion

The letter is structured as follows. It opens with a salutation (1:1–2) and opening argument (1:3–11). The body of the letter contains a series of arguments in support of the author’s position (1:16–3:13). The letter then closes with a final encouragement (3:14–18). Notice that the letter does not have a typical letter ending but merely a simple doxology in 3:18, leading some to believe that it is more a homily that was sent out with a letter opening (and an inserted resumptive address in 3:1) than an actual letter.

As noted above, the letter appears to have been written to oppose Epicurean influence. The Epicureans believed that everything (the world as a whole, including the gods) was made of atoms, that everything was heading toward final dissolution, that it followed that there was no individual future after death and certainly no final judgment, and that the best life was therefore lived for the present by maximizing pleasure. They were observant enough to realize that unbridled hedonism was not pleasant

(as anyone who has eaten or drunk too much can testify), so they called for people to live according to the “golden mean,” that level of self-indulgence that maximized pleasure without leading to negative consequences. Some version of such teaching has apparently infiltrated the community of those who follow Jesus, and the author of 2 Peter is not impressed by this wisdom, for it means a life lived without regard to the imperial rule of Jesus and his coming judgment.

Commentary

[1. Salutation \(1:1–2\)](#)

The letter opens with the identification of the author as “Simeon Peter” (RSV; NIV: “Simon Peter”)—this work uses the more original form of the name, Simeon (as in Acts 15:14), rather than the shortened version Simon. He is writing to those with “a faith as precious as ours”—so, to faithful believers. The expression “our God and Savior Jesus Christ” is unusual and unlike similar expressions later in the letter. If our author is following the normal rules of Greek, he is talking about a single person, which makes this one of the clearer New Testament statements identifying Jesus as God.

[2. Opening Statement \(1:3–11\)](#)

The opening statement consists of two parts. The first part (1:3–4) uses Hellenistic concepts and unusual language to point out that Jesus took the initiative in delivering us and that this deliverance was accomplished through “our knowledge of” him (meaning personal knowledge and commitment, not just knowing about him). This enables us, on the one hand, to “participate in the divine nature” (a bold statement that we can become like Jesus/God) and, on the other, to “escape the corruption in the world” that is caused by desire. (“Evil” is not in the Greek text; for the Hellenistic world *all* desire was problematic and is the root of evil.) One cannot participate in the divine nature without escaping from the corruption in the world.

Therefore, the second part (1:5–11) is about the virtues (not listed in any particular order) that will make us more like Jesus. Pursuing these virtues

(many of them community-preserving virtues) does not only make one's commitment to Jesus better; it also makes it more secure, preventing one from falling away. If we are moving toward the center, Jesus, we are in no danger of slipping back into the pit from which we were rescued. Thus, this action will make sure not only that we are warmly welcomed when Jesus returns as emperor of this world (1:11) but also that we do not fall away and miss out on the rule of Jesus altogether, as the author of 2 Peter believes that some have done (1:9, picked up in 2:1–22).

3. Purpose Statement (1:12–15)

The purpose of the letter is testamental (similar to the purpose of other biblical [e.g., Gen. 49:1–28; Deut. 33:1–29] and extrabiblical testaments [e.g., the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*])—namely, that after his death the addressees will have a written record of Peter's teaching and so always be able to remember it. The reason this is necessary is that (1) Peter is mortal (he refers to his mortal body as a tent, as Paul does in 2 Cor. 5:1, where the resurrection body is a “house”—in other words, permanent), and (2) he believes that his death (as predicted by Jesus in either John 13:36 or 21:18–19) is impending (although he does not tell us why he believes this). This letter is to “remind” his addressees and to “refresh [their] memory” since they are “firmly established in the truth” (1:12–13), which is a rhetorically polite statement that assumes the best about them. However, the fact that he is writing this letter indicates his fear that they could be vulnerable to the new teaching of those he labels “false teachers.”

4. Arguments in Support of His Position (1:16–3:13)

Given 2 Peter's thesis (1) that God has intervened by means of Jesus to free human beings from the power of evil that is rooted in desire and (2) that in order to live in this deliverance one needs to pursue virtue, one would then expect support for this assertion. The author does this by means of a series of arguments, which he introduces by his polite assertion that his addressees know and are practicing all this but that, given his impending death, it is his duty to “remind” them (1:12). It is clear from what follows in chapter 2 that he believes they are under threat; but in the Hellenistic world it was polite to phrase your instruction as a reminder, so this is rhetorically

effective. Furthermore, since his impending death casts this letter into the form of a final testament, this also lends weight to his arguments as the “last words” of a revered leader.

A. Apostolic eyewitness (1:16–18). The first argument refers to the transfiguration, also found in Mark 9:2–8 and its parallels. Second Peter presents this as an eyewitness account of the enthronement of Jesus, describing it by terms like “majesty” and “honor and glory” with a voice coming from the “Majestic Glory,” designating Jesus as God’s Son. Jesus’s reign has already been inaugurated, and if Jesus already reigns, trifling with his leadership and teaching and denying his “coming” are unwise indeed.

B. Prophetic witness (1:19–21). The experience of the transfiguration confirms what the prophets said. That is, Peter is not basing his argument on his religious experience alone but sees that experience as in continuity with the ancient prophets. We do not know which prophets he refers to (although there is an apparent allusion to Num. 24:17), but the author of 2 Peter wants to make clear that the prophets recorded in Scripture received not only the visions that they had from the Spirit but also the interpretation of those visions; so the prophets’ interpretation of their visions were not “the prophet’s own interpretation” but were just as directed by the Holy Spirit as were the visions. Did the teachers whom the author of 2 Peter opposes perhaps argue that, while inspired, the ancient prophets misinterpreted their visions and that they themselves had the right interpretation?

C. Certainty of judgment (2:1–10a). At this point our author reveals his central concern, as he incorporates the material he takes from Jude. There were false prophets in the past, and there are false teachers now. In Jude the others are outsiders, never named, and never said to be teachers. Here they are insiders (“among you”) who are “false teachers,” and it is only the new ideas that come from outside. (They “introduce” them.) The phrase “destructive heresies” means not so much false doctrine (the denial of the return of Jesus is a secondary issue and so left to last) as ideas that lead to divisions in the community. (“Heresy” indicates they separated into a party or sect.) It is also clear that these ideas lead to “depraved conduct” (some form of promiscuity) that even those in the larger pagan community around the believers would condemn (“bring the way of truth into disrepute”) and that these teachers based this teaching on “fabricated stories” (perhaps

stories about spiritual experiences or visions), unlike the story of the transfiguration and the words of the prophets.

God, of course, is not fooled and will not be slow to judge them. The author gives a series of examples drawn from Jude, which he edits to stress that God can judge and at the same time save the righteous, rather than having to remove the righteous first or being prevented from judging because of the presence of the righteous. (Was this the teaching opposed by the author of 2 Peter?) The first example (2:4) is a reading of Genesis 6:1–8 through the lens of works like *1 Enoch*, in which the sinning beings are angels who are subsequently imprisoned. (Second Peter uses the term “Tartarus” [see NIV note], the prison of the Titans in Greek mythology.) But while the “ungodly people” influenced by the angels perished, Noah, “a preacher of righteousness” (an idea drawn from extrabiblical Jewish stories about Noah), was saved. The same is true about Sodom and Gomorrah and the rescue of Lot (2:7), whose “tormented” soul is also an idea drawn from extrabiblical Jewish traditions, although his righteousness may be implied from Genesis 18. The author’s conclusion is that it is no problem for God to distinguish between the “godly” and the “unrighteous” in judgment (he does not have to remove the righteous first, and he does not worry that in judging the unrighteous he will accidentally harm the righteous) and that his judgment falls in particular on those following their natural desires (again, it is desire that is the culprit) and despising divine authority.

D. Denunciation of the false teachers (2:10b–22). The thesis that God distinguishes in judgment leads into a denunciation of the false teachers. Unlike the holy angels, these teachers slander celestial beings. (The clear reference found in Jude to the *Testament of Moses* has been removed.) But such behavior is simply emotional reaction and thus from what we would call the “animal brain”—so these teachers will die like animals.

The author charges these teachers with carousing (and not even trying to hide it) at the Lord’s Supper (“while they feast with you”), adultery, and greed (financially exploiting the community). The last charge makes them like Balaam (also mentioned in Jude), who prophesied or taught for money (both practices—especially prophecy for money—were rejected in the early church). Balaam’s action (and, by implication, that of the teachers) was so shameful that a dumb animal rebuked him verbally! (In Num. 22:30 the donkey speaks, but in 22:32–33 it is the angel who rebukes Balaam;

however, in Second Temple Jewish literature the eloquent rebuke is in the donkey's mouth.)



The "Balaam inscription" found at Deir 'Alla (800 BC) is so named because it mentions

Balaam son of Beor (see Numbers 22–24). In
2 Peter 2:15–16, the false teachers are
accused of following the way of Balaam, who
had to be rebuked by his donkey. [Copyright ©

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Archaeological Museum, Amman.]

These teachers promise much but deliver little (2:17–18). They have been and still claim to be followers of Jesus and, as pointed out in 2 Peter 1:3–5, have therefore been delivered from the power of desire. But now they are enslaved to it again (so the “freedom” from conventional morality that they promise is a sham, since they are not truly free themselves). Therefore, they are worse off than if they had never become believers (2:20–21), presumably because they will receive harsher judgment than those who have never accepted the good news. This shocking conclusion is capped off with the citation of two proverbs, one Jewish and one pagan (2 Pet. 2:22).

E. Recapitulation and introduction of the second part of the argument (3:1–2). Our author pauses to recapitulate: this is a second letter (the first is not necessarily 1 Peter), and both simply remind the addressees what they already know from the Scriptures (“holy prophets”) and those evangelizing them (“your apostles”).

F. Mockers shown to be illogical (3:3–7). These teachers are the “scoffers” predicted to come in the “last days.” (Many in the early church believed they were in the “last days.”) Obviously, if one is living immorally, one can hardly believe in a judgment in which one will be called to account. These teachers therefore deny that there will be a “coming” of Jesus and that “he will judge the living and the dead” (to quote the later Apostles’ Creed). Perhaps they thought that all judgment had been taken care of on the cross or in the fall of Jerusalem, and so it was past. The world, so they argued, goes on steadily.

The author again points to Noah. The earth, pictured as rising in creation out of the seas and with waters in the firmament above it, was destroyed by that very water; God will do it again, but this time by fire rather than water. The idea that the world is indissoluble forgets biblical history.

G. Delay of the still certain final judgment (3:8–13). But what about that “coming”? Jesus manifestly had not returned, and it had been decades since his resurrection. The author argues that (1) God’s sense of time is not

the human sense (which, although not his point, is the understanding of the psalmist in Ps. 90:4 and was a common Jewish understanding), (2) God is not slow, but patient, and (3) God will in fact bring judgment at an unexpected time. (The image of the thief is drawn from Jesus [Matt. 6:19; Luke 12:39] and used by Paul [1 Thess. 5:2].) Our author admits that God has delayed the return of Jesus but insists it is for a purpose: God does not want “anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). Presumably, then, when the judgment comes, God will have decided that he cannot deliver any more people through continued delay.

The sudden judgment, when it comes, will mean the removal of heaven (the firmament that is between where God is and the earth) and the heavenly bodies (the “elements”—as the term is used in a number of ancient texts—that hang in or from the firmament and thus will be destroyed with it). This will leave the earth “laid bare” (not destroyed) so all is open to the divine eye and easily judged.

Since even the heavens above (thought by ancients to control life on earth) are impermanent, believers should be living for the permanent, the renewed earth, purged of all evil, with, of course, a new heaven (since the old was destroyed in the course of judgment), which God has promised. The way one lives for this is not by talking about it but by living “holy and godly lives” (3:11).

5. Final Encouragement to Stability (3:14–18)

Our author sums up. (1) Live holy lives (3:14). (2) Think of the delay in the coming of Jesus as “our Lord’s patience,” which means “salvation”—perhaps the recipients’ salvation, for Christ could have come before they came to know and commit to him. Then our author notes (3) that Paul agrees with this teaching in at least three of his letters (the Greek form indicates that the author of 2 Peter knows of more than two letters, but we do not know how many of Paul’s letters he knows), although, as was already clear in 1 Corinthians 5–6, some took Paul’s teaching on grace to mean that licentious living would not be punished. Such distortion of Paul would lead to the destruction of the distorters.

The final reminder (3:17) is to “be on your guard” and thus not to be deceived and fall themselves, for the holy lives they are now living in obedience to Jesus are a “secure position.” The letter (or perhaps sermon

with a letter opening) ends with a blessing and doxology: the blessing is a summary of 2 Peter 1:5–8 and focuses on our imperial ruler and deliverer, Jesus, God’s anointed king (to put our author’s titles into more modern form). And certainly he will indeed have all honor (i.e., “glory”) now and forever.

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Jude

PETER H. DAVIDS

Outline

1. Salutation (1–2)

2. Letter Body (3–23)

A. Opening: Reason for Writing (3–4)

B. Main Discussion: Denunciation of the Intruding Teachers (5–16)

C. Conclusion: Response of the Believers (17–23)

3. Benediction (24–25)

Introduction

Author

The Letter of Jude identifies the author as “Jude . . . brother of James.” The Jude (or Judah or Judas, which are all transliterations of the same name) intended here is the younger brother of the James (Jacob) to whom the Letter of James is attributed. This James in turn was the leader of the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem from at least AD 44 to 61 and the James whom Mark 6:3 identifies as a younger brother of Jesus himself. That would make Jude Jesus’s youngest (Matt. 13:55) or second-youngest (Mark 6:3) brother. Much later, the canonical arrangement of the seven Catholic Epistles, or General Letters, put James as the first letter in the collection and

Jude, written by the brother of James, as the last, bracketing the works of the others with letters attributed to brothers of Jesus.

We know nothing about Jude's life or his role in the Jesus movement after Jesus's resurrection. It is clear, though, that the writer believes he has authority to speak to those whom he addresses, not least because he is the brother of James, but also because he is "a servant [slave] of Jesus Christ." Thus, as a servant, while not having any rank of his own, he speaks with the authority of his master, as Moses did for God and slaves of Caesar did for Caesar.

A number of scholars question whether the traditional author did write Jude. In reality, there is no way to prove or disprove whether or not Jude the brother of James wrote this work or whether it was written in his name, for we know nothing of his education (the author of the letter has at least a good Greek primary education), nor do we have other work by him to indicate his writing style and theology. All one can say about the author is that he is very familiar with Second Temple Jewish literature, that he has an excellent Greek vocabulary and decent Hellenistic education, and that it is not clear whether or not he knows either Hebrew or Aramaic—Richard Bauckham believes he does, while others question this. If one doubts that this author is Jude, then one must ask why someone would write in the name of such an "unknown" rather than pick the name of a more famous leader in the Jesus movement.



Audience and Date

No information is given about either those to whom the letter is addressed or the historical circumstances of Jude's composition, except that the author expects the recipients to be familiar with Second Temple Jewish literature. Furthermore, any extrabiblical traditions we have about the brothers of Jesus connect their lives and descendants with Palestine, so that would be consistent with a Palestinian provenance for the letter and would perhaps indicate that the addressees were not too far away (although far enough from the author that a letter was needed). It is also clear that the letter is not really a "general," or "catholic," epistle since it is clearly written to a specific group of followers of Jesus whom the author knows and who know the author (e.g., he refers to them as "dear friends"; v. 3). The author views his addressees as at risk because of a group of others (they are never given a name) who have entered the community and are introducing destructive practices, probably on the authority of their prophetic dreams (they are called "dreamers"; v. 8 KJV, NRSV).

We therefore do not know when Jude was written. If it had a Palestinian origin, then it was probably written before 66, the outbreak of the war

against Rome, although a date a decade or so later—when life was becoming more normal after the destruction of Jerusalem—is possible. Knowing that 2 Peter made use of Jude’s letter only helps to place Jude in the first century, for 2 Peter has been variously dated from 64 to 90 (though sometimes much later). Given the reference to James, who was martyred in 61, a date after James’s death and before the war with Rome may be as likely as any.

Jude was valued early in its history, because, as noted above, it was used as the basis of 2 Peter 2:1–3:3; the fact that the same topics are discussed in the same order, that some phrases and illustrations are identical, and that the issues addressed are similar indicates that this conclusion is well established. But after that we do not hear of Jude for over a century. In the third and fourth centuries, the work was disputed, but we are not told the reasons, although it is speculated that Jude’s use of noncanonical literature may have been part of the reason. Jude does appear in fourth-century biblical collections, and by the end of the century it is included in canon lists. However, despite official acceptance, the work has been neglected for much of its history.

Structure and Content

The structure of the work is relatively clear. The letter opens with a salutation (vv. 1–2), then the body consists of an opening to the main topic (vv. 3–4), a discussion of the intruding teachers (vv. 5–16), and a conclusion (vv. 17–23). A benediction closes the letter (vv. 24–25).

The short letter is a contrast between those “dear friends” who are faithful (“kept for/by” [cf. NIV note] or “kept safe” [NRSV], v. 1), whose job it is to build themselves up in the faith (v. 20), and those others who have left the faith, their departure meaning that by word and action they are living in opposition to the ethical teaching of Jesus.

Commentary

[1. Salutation \(1–2\)](#)

The salutation is brief, identifying the author, as we have noted, and then identifying the recipients as people who have been “called,” “loved,” and “kept” by God the Father and Jesus Christ. There is no criticism of these “dear friends” stated anywhere in the letter.

2. Letter Body (3–23)

A. Opening: Reason for writing (3–4). After the salutation comes the reason for writing. While about to write in another vein, Jude has received information that means he must instead exhort the community he addresses to “contend for the faith,” which will be defined in 22–23 as holding fast to what they are committed to and rescuing those who are deceived (i.e., the others and any they have influenced). The reason this is necessary is that these others have entered the congregation and are presently functioning within the community (Jude 12). Jude makes two related charges: they pervert grace into “a license for immorality” and they thereby deny “Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord” (v. 4). In other words, living in disobedience to Jesus is a form of apostasy.

B. Main discussion: Denunciation of the intruding teachers (5–16). In the main section of the letter body, the author denounces the others, using groups-of-three illustrations originally from the Old Testament but now read through the lens of Second Temple Jewish literature. The first group (vv. 5–7) is the people saved in the exodus, the angels of Genesis 6:1–8, and Sodom and Gomorrah. Two of the three were once saved or had a dwelling with God, while all three were finally destroyed. The Genesis 6 story, read through the lens of *1 Enoch*, and Sodom are put last because each refers to sexual relations across a forbidden boundary (i.e., angel/human; in Jude 7 literally “strange flesh”). The others in the community are apparently crossing some type of sexual boundary, doing things that were not approved of even in the culture surrounding the believing community (perhaps like the man in 1 Cor. 5:1).



Icon of the archangel Michael (tenth century). Jude 9 holds up Michael as an example, referring to an account from the *Testament of Moses*. [Copyright © The Yorck Project / Wikimedia.]

These “dreamers” (possibly indicating the source of their “revelation” [v. 8]; NIV “on the strength of their dreams these ungodly people”) not only cross such boundaries but they also “reject authority,” slandering the good angels (“celestial beings” or “the glorious ones”), perhaps those who were thought to have brought the law (and thereby ethical rules) to Moses (vv. 8–10). Unlike the archangel Michael, who in the *Testament of Moses* argued respectfully with the devil over whether or not Moses deserved burial (the devil accused Moses of having been a murderer in Egypt) and who left judgment to God (“The Lord rebuke you!”), these others, lacking the propriety of Michael, are like animals in that they do not understand what they slander. They are also like animals in that they follow their instincts, not realizing that these impulses will in the end destroy them.

The reference to the *Testament of Moses*, then, gives way to the second group of three: Cain, Balaam, and Korah (v. 11). This woe oracle sounds like it was pulled out of Old Testament prophecy. While the first and last of the group were rebels, all three were viewed in Jewish tradition as having taught evil. There is a crescendo in the descriptions: “taken the way of,” “rushed for profit into,” “been destroyed in.” Only the spiritually suicidal would emulate them.

These others are a part of the local community of believers (vv. 12–13), for they participate in the Lord’s Supper, which in that period was a full meal, a “love feast.” Yet they are a defilement of that meal. Furthermore, they are there for their own gain, not for worship or building up others. Thus they are like Balaam or like the shepherds of Ezekiel 34:2. Four images create a vivid warning about them: (1) waterless clouds and (2) fruitless autumn trees indicate they promise much but do not deliver; (3) waves seem impressive, but these stir up “shame”; and (4) stars (believed by ancients to be angelic powers) that are wandering rather than in their proper courses (which parallels the clouds being “blown along”) are doomed. Such stars will be destroyed, as was the case with the angels of Genesis 6:1–8.

The message of destruction is underlined by the quotation from *1 Enoch* 1:9 (vv. 14–17). As we noted above, our author is familiar with Second Temple Jewish literature such as the *Testament of Moses* and *1 Enoch*. Furthermore, the way he refers to a number of Old Testament stories shows that he is influenced by how these stories were retold in Second Temple literature. Here we find the only quotation of a “scripture” in the whole

work, and it is the quotation of a “prophecy” that Jude attributes to Enoch (just as Matt. 13:14 refers to the “prophecy” of Isaiah and Matt. 15:7 says, “Isaiah . . . prophesied”). We now know the quotation as part of the opening chapter of *1 Enoch* (which is probably a composite book). Jude cites this work in an unself-conscious manner. He is, of course, not aware that there would later be canonical discussions and that *1 Enoch* would not form part of the eventual canon. For him it is simply an authoritative prophecy that he knows is appropriate for his topic, and he cites it as freely as he might have cited other prophets such as Isaiah or Jeremiah. The point of the prophecy is straightforward: final judgment is coming. Those for whom this judgment is a danger include not just the “sinners” named in the prophecy but also the others in the community, who are accused of grumbling (a term found only here, but the idea is also in James 5:9), being driven by their desires, and buttering up others. These sins were important to Jude but are sometimes forgotten about or downplayed today.

C. Conclusion: Response of the believers (17–23). The final section of the letter counsels the readers what to do about this situation. It is here that Jude surprises the modern reader the most, for he does not instruct them to throw the others out.

First, the “dear friends” are not to be surprised but rather to remember apostolic predictions (which were not passed down beyond that age, for they are not found elsewhere in the New Testament or church tradition) that this rejection of Jesus’s morality is precisely what would happen in “the last times” (or “at the end of time”). Such people are members of the community of believers in which they cause divisions, but in fact they are totally of this age (“follow mere natural instincts” or “are soulish”) and “do not have the Spirit.”

Second, in contrast to such people, the dear friends are to strengthen themselves in their holy commitment (NIV “holy faith”; but it is not doctrine but commitment that is intended), to pray in the Spirit (which they clearly have and which the others, who do not have it, claim is leading them), and especially to look expectantly toward the final judgment, when they will receive mercy from “our Lord Jesus Christ.” Thus they are to keep on being faithful as they have been doing.

Third, they are to rescue everyone they can from the false teaching, exercising mercy rather than judgment yet being careful that in the process they themselves are not sucked in. In fact, a better translation of Jude 22 is,

“Be merciful to those who dispute,” that is, the others. There is not a word about attacking and expelling the others who have come into the community; rather, the faithful are to live the truth themselves and rescue those trapped in desire. Verse 23 probably speaks of two actions toward one group: snatch them from the fire and show them mercy—but do so in a manner in which you are not yourselves contaminated.

3. Benediction (24–25)

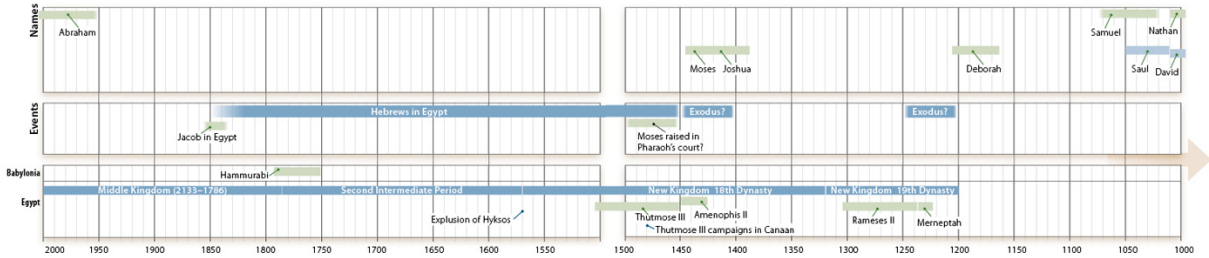
The benediction is an elaborate blessing of God, who is first described as the one who can keep the readers stable and bring them successfully to his presence, which should relieve any fear that may have been engendered by this letter, including fear of being contaminated in the course of trying to rescue the others. Thus, he is “God our Savior,” an unusual expression for God, although his saving acts are frequently celebrated in Scripture. This is done through Jesus Christ our Lord, for the believer (unlike the others) lives under the lordship of Jesus, and it is only in this way that he or she is related to “God our Savior.” Finally, this culminates in ascribing eternal honor and authority to this God, as would be fitting in the court of such a king.

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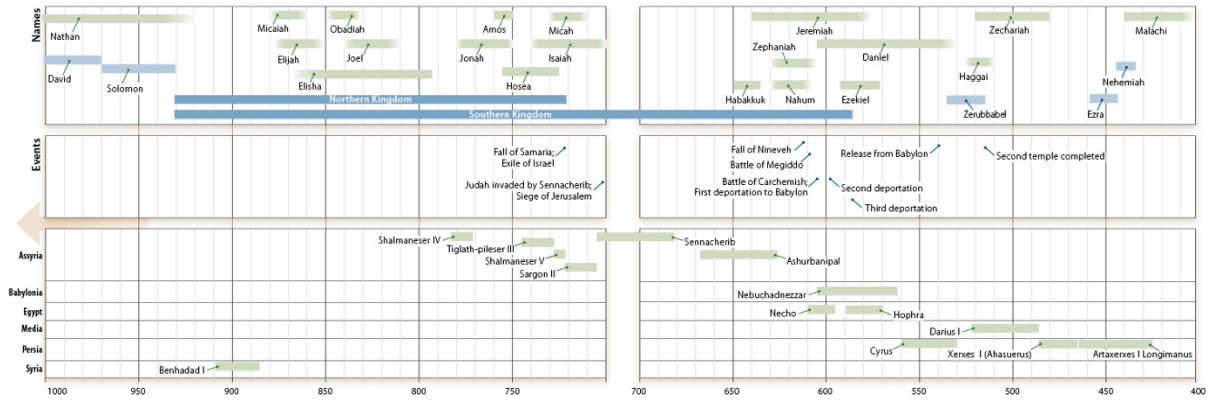
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Time Lines

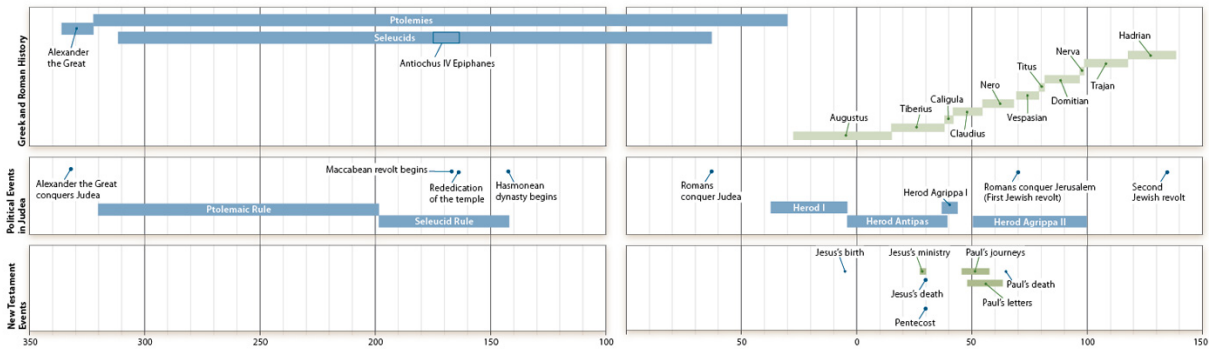
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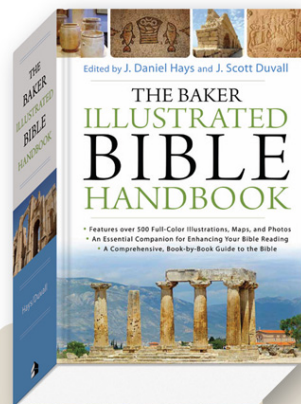


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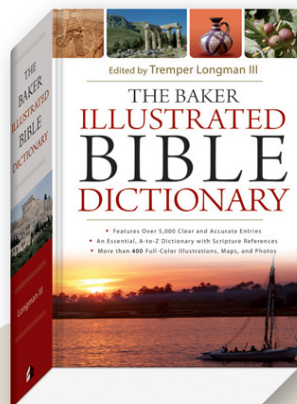
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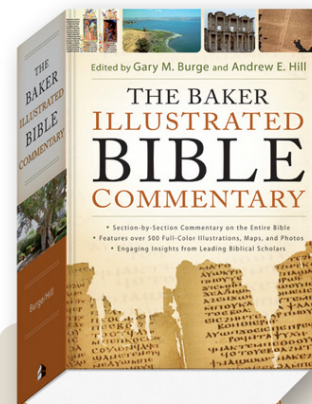
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