

#20. THE LETTERS FROM PETER

1. **First and Second Peter** are letters written by Simon Peter near the end of his life. The first letter concerns steadfastness in suffering, while the second letter warns against false teachers and the destruction they bring. Both letters are dated during the period of 64-67AD, approaching the time Peter's execution. A well-known Christian tradition describes Peter's death by crucifixion in an up-side down position. This manner of execution was upon Peter's request. He said he was not worthy to die in the same manner as his Lord.

2. **Author and date**
 - Simon Peter was born in Bethsaida in Galilee and was the son of Jonah and brother of Andrew the Apostle. He is first among the original twelve apostles.

 - First Peter was probably written in about 64 or 65AD, while the subsequent epistle was certainly written as late 66 or 67AD, just before Peter's execution by Roman authorities (2 Peter 1:3). A well-known Christian tradition describes Peter's death taking place by crucifixion in an up-side down position. This manner of execution was because Peter said he was not worthy to die in the same manner as his Lord.

3. **Peter's emphasis** in the first letter is the encouragement of Jewish Christians who were suffering persecution during the reign of Nero as well as continued persecution from certain Jewish groups who had not accepted Jesus as Messiah.

In the second letter, challenges the Believers to be on guard against false teachers. According to 2 Peter 1:3, Peter was sensing his time of death was near, and in typical apostolic fashion, he was concerned that those he left behind would be faithful to The Lord and to true doctrine.

4. Key Chapters

- **In 1 Peter:**
 - Chapters 1 and 2 highlight God's blessing to His people.

 - Chapters 2, 3, and 4 encourage Christians to be faithful and courageous during persecution.

- Chapter 5 admonishes the pastors to lead the way during the difficult days.
- **In 2 Peter:**
 - Chapter 1 teaches the Believers how to grow in faith by paying attention to Scripture and true teachers.
 - Chapter 2 warns them about false teachers and the deception they employ.
 - Chapter 3 reminds them of Christ's Return.

5. Key Verses

- **1 Peter 1:6-9 NIV** “In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”
- **1 Peter 2:11, 12 NIV** “Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. ¹²Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”
- **1 Peter 4:12-16 NIV** “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. ¹⁶However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.”
- **2 Peter 1:19-21 NIV** “We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. ²⁰Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. ²¹For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

- **2 Peter 2:1-3 NIV** “But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. ²Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. ³In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.”

6. Key People

- **Peter** - also known as Simon Peter or Simon Bar-Jonah. The author of both letters and the source of the material found in the Gospel of Luke.
- **Silas and Mark** - fellow ministers who assisted **Paul** in the preparation of the first letter.
- **Paul** - is referred to by Peter in his second epistle (3:15, 16).

7. Key Places

- **Jerusalem** - as persecution increased, more and more Jewish Believers were being forced from the Holy City. All Jews (whether Messianic or not) were the target of various persecutions, such as the banishing of Jews from Rome by Emperor Claudius.
- **Rome** - the origin of Peter’s letters.
- **The regions of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia Minor, and Bithynia** - these areas were the places to which many of the persecuted Jewish Believers had fled.

8. Key Themes

- **Persecution** - it is probable that Nero burned Rome (July 18, 19, 64AD), creating a crisis in order to fulfill his aggressive building program. He placed the blame, however on the Christians. They were already disliked because of their Jewish background, and because they were seen as hostile toward the culture of the Empire. As a result, persecution against the Christians spread in many places throughout the Empire
- **The Return of The Lord** - Peter indicated as we approached the day of Christ’s Return,

there would be increased cynicism and hardened hearts. Be on guard, lest that toxic attitude affect each of us.

- **Holy Living** - is the result of personal disciple and moral fiber. We should live as Christ lived (1 John 3:1-3). This Holy Living is key in overcoming apostasy. If we suffer, it should not be caused by our sin, but rather by our devotion to Christ Jesus (1 Peter 2:20).
- **False Doctrine** - not only is false doctrine *wrong*, it is also *deadly*. It spreads throughout the body like a cancer, therefore it must be aggressively rebuked and corrected.
- **Faithfulness** - God keeps good records! When He returns, He will bring His reward with Him!

9. The Contents of 1 and 2 Peter -

- **First Peter**

- Greetings to the Diaspora (1:1, 2)
- Remember Our Faith and Hope is in Christ. (1:3-2:10)
- Remember to Live with Integrity While in Adverse Circumstances. (2:11-4:6)
- Our Lord will Return and Set Everything In Order. (4:7-5:11)
- Farewell (5:12-14)

- **Second Peter**

- Greetings to the People of God (1:1, 2)
- We can know we are saved. (1:3-11)
- We can have confidence in The Scriptures (1:12-21)
- We are aware our enemies (2:1-22)

- We await the Return of The Lord while Standing Against End Time Deceivers (3:1-17)
- Benediction (3:18)

Worth noting about the Epistles of Peter

- Second Peter was the last book admitted into the New Testament Canon. There was considerable debate over the style of writing, and the lack of a clear audience and occasion. Some feel that though the work is inspired by the Spirit, it may have been written on Peter's behalf by one of his associates. This possibility need not affect our understanding as to 2 Peter's rightful place in the Canon of Scripture.
- We should note that 2 Peter 1:1 lays claim to Petrine authorship (3:1). He also refers to his first letter in 1:14.
- There are similarities between 2 Peter and the Book of Jude.

When reading 1 and 2 Peter:

- Remember that Peter was probably in Rome for some time when the persecution under Emperor Nero began.
- Though the letters are to Timothy, it becomes clear that Paul is writing to the church as well. This is the same pattern we see in the letters to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3. This was intended to give greater authority to Timothy and Titus in the eyes of the congregation.
- It can be argued that 2 Peter was written to the church in general, not just to the Jews of the Diaspora (the Jews living outside Israel).