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THE FIRST LETTER OF PETER

According to fourth-century church father Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 2.23.25; 6.14.1; see 3.25.2–3) and other early Christian writers, 1 Peter is one of the general or “catholic” epistles, alongside James, 1,2,3 John, 2 Peter, and Jude. These letters do not address a particular church (in this case a group of churches), but rather, address the general condition of churches.

First Peter aims to strengthen Christians—along with Acts 11.26 and 26.28, 1 Pet 4.16 is the only place in the New Testament where the term “Christian” appears—in a time of distress by offering them a theology through which to understand their suffering. They are taught to identify with the suffering of Christ, who also suffered unjustly, and to understand that suffering for being a Christian is a sign that the end of history is at hand (4.12–16). The epistle assures its readers that when Christ returns, those who have suffered for their faith will receive the reward of eternal glory (1.7; 2.11; 4.13; 5.4,10–11). For 1 Peter, faith means hope. Obedience and love are also essential, for they show the outside world that Christians are not a threat, but rather, model citizens.

The apostle Peter is the implied author of this letter (1.1; 5.1; 5.12–13), writing just before his death in Rome (known here as Babylon). The recipients are communities in the northern area of Asia Minor [Turkey] (1.1–2). References to “exiles” and “Dispersion” (1.1–2) may imply that this letter was directed to Jews, but many verses (1.14,18; 2.10; 4.3–4) point to the Gentile origin of at least many in these churches.

While second- and third-century Christian leaders such as Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* 4.9.2; 4.16.5; 5.7.2), Tertullian (*Scorp.* 12), and Clement of Alexandria (*Paed.* 1.6.44) believed that the letter was by Peter the apostle, many modern scholars believe that it was written, in the apostle’s name, at the end of the first or the beginning of the second century. Peter was a Galilean fisherman, and the Greek of this letter is too good to have come from Peter’s hand, although the style could be attributed to Sylvanus, the letter’s scribe (see 5.12). More indicative of pseudepigraphical authorship: the letter’s scriptural quotations are from the Septuagint rather than the Hebrew text, and the Greek form of Peter’s name (rather than the Aram Cephas) is used in this epistle. Furthermore, there is no known connection between the historical Peter and the churches in Asia. Finally, this letter shows significant similarities to Romans and Ephesians (cf. 1 Pet 3.8–9 and Rom 12.16–18; 1 Pet 2.4–5 and Eph 2.1–21). Most likely, this letter was written in Rome in the style of Paul’s letters but in the name of Peter.

First Peter adopts terms and scriptural citations that Jews used to express their exclusive covenant with God and applies them to the Christian community. For example, 1 Peter transfers to the church the theological concept of Israel as “chosen” (1.2; 5.13). Readers are described as *parepidemotai* (“sojourners, resident aliens, visitors”) in 1.2 and 2.9, and *paroikoi* (“sojourners, aliens”) in 2.11 and 1.17, words that the LXX employs to point to the status of Israelites and Jews in a foreign place. (Elsewhere in the New Testament [Heb 11.9,13], these words are used to describe the patriarchs.) First Peter identifies its Gentile readers as living in the “Dispersion,” a term rare in secular Greek but used in the LXX (Deut 28.25; Jer 15.7; Ps 146[147].2) and in Jas 1.1 to describe the scattering of Jewish communities outside the Land of Israel. The readers have been sanctified by the sprinkling of blood (1.2), alluding to Jewish rites of purification and/or covenant ceremonies (Ex 24). Readers have received an inheritance (1.4), which in the Tanakh/LXX usually refers to the land of Israel (e.g., Num 34.2; Deut 20.6; Josh 17.4), though later Jewish literature uses the word in reference to possession of the entire earth in end times (*Jub.* 32.19) or life beyond this earth (2 Esd [4 Ezra] 7.9,17; *Pss. Sol.* 14.10; 1 En. 40.9). In 1 Pet 1.4 this inheritance is preserved for the Christ-believers in heaven. In other words, for 1 Peter, Israel’s promises now belong to the Church.

Marcie Lenk

1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ²who have been chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood:

May grace and peace be yours in abundance.

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready

to be revealed in the last time. ⁶In this you rejoice, ⁷even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸Although you have not seen^b him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, ⁹for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

^a Or *Rejoice in this*

^b Other ancient authorities read *known*

1.1–2: Greetings. **1:** *Peter*, called Simon in the Gospels (e.g., Mt 1.30; Mk 1.16,30; Lk 5.8; Jn 1.40), and Cephas, the Aramaic for the Greek “petros” meaning “stone” or “rock,” in most of Paul’s writings (1 Cor 1.12; 3.22; 9.5; 15.5; Gal 1.18; 2.9,11,14). Jesus names him Peter (Mt 16.18; see Mk 3.16; Lk 6.14), and Paul once refers to him as Peter (Gal 2.7–8). *Apostle*, lit., “one sent out.” Paul uses “apostle” for himself and other leaders of communities in Christ (Rom 1.1; 16.7; 1 Cor 1.1; Gal 1.1). *Exiles of the Dispersion* (Gk “diaspora”), likely a metaphor expressing the view that Christians perceive themselves as outsiders within Roman, pagan culture, and as separated from their true kingdom in heaven (1.4; 3.22). The text applies the condition of the (Jewish) exiles of 597 and 586 BCE in the Babylonian Diaspora to Jesus’ followers in *Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia*, regions in Asia Minor (Turkey). **2:** *Chosen* (Gk “eklektos”), appearing in the Gk in v 1 and not v 2, reflects the idea that exile is part of their chosenness. As God chose Israel and accompanied the people into Babylonian exile (Jer 29.4), so God chose this group and is with them in the exile of their suffering. See 1.17–18. *God the Father*, metaphor is used only occasionally in the Tanakh, e.g., Deut 32.6; see Ex 4.22–23; Deut 1.31, but common in the NT, e.g., Mt 6.9; Mk 14.36. *Spirit*, God’s presence in the world, Jn 14.16–17; 20.22; Acts 2.1–4. *Sprinkled with his blood*, in Ex 24.3–8, Moses sprinkles the Israelites with blood at Mt. Sinai in a ceremony reflecting sanctification and obedience. Sprinkling with the blood of Christ enhances the connection between Christ’s suffering and that of the letter’s recipients. *Grace and peace*, typical greetings in a Greek letter, see Rom 1.7; 1 Cor 1.3; 2 Thess 1.2; Titus 1.4; like the Heb “hesed” and “shalom,” it points to values of self-giving and well-being.

1.3–12: Blessing. **3:** *Blessed be the God*, God is praised, as in Jewish blessing formula, “Blessed are you God, king of the universe” (*b. Ber.* 12a). *New birth*, Jn 3.3,5,7; Titus 3.5; Jas 1.18. *Resurrection*, Mt 28; Lk 24; Jn 20–21; Rom 6.4–5; *b. Sanh.* 92b; *Lev. Rab.* 27.4; *Lam. Rab.* 3.23. **4:** *Inheritance*, the promise of salvation. In the Tanakh the inheritance of the people of Israel is the land (e.g., Num 34.2; Deut 20.6; Josh 17.4) and God (Deut 4.20; Ps 33.12), though later Jewish literature uses “inheritance” in reference to possession of the entire earth in end times (*Jub.* 32.19), life beyond this earth (2 Esd [4 Ezra] 7.9,17; *Pss. Sol.* 14.10; 1 En. 40.9; *b. Ber.* 51a), or Torah (*Mek. Beshalahk* 10; *Eccl. Rab.* 7.11). *Imperishable, undefiled, and unfading*, believers are assured that God will repay them for their faith, although at present they are not able to enjoy physical gains in this world. What is now experienced as perishable, defiled, and fading will ultimately be the opposite. *Kept in heaven*, God’s promise is guaranteed, though it has not yet been delivered. See Ps 31.20; Col 1.5; *m. Avot* 4.16; *b. Qidd.* 39b. **5:** *To be revealed*, see 1.7n. *Last time*, Gen 49.1; Isa 2.2–4; Jer 49.39; Ezek 38.16; *b. Sanh.* 99a; *b. Ber.* 34b. In their original contexts, the Tanakh verses mean “in the future,” without any implication of the end of time. **6:** *Suffer various trials*, some prophets told of an eschatological time of punishment and suffering, e.g., Am 5.18–20; 8.9–12; Zeph 2.1–4; Dan 12.1–2. Rabbinic tradition refers to suffering before the final redemption as “hevlo shel mashiah,” the birth pangs of the Messiah (*b. Pesah.* 118a; *b. Sanh.* 88b). **7:** *Faith . . . tested by fire*, suffering should not be understood as punishment from

¹⁰ Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, ¹¹ inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory. ¹² It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in regard to the things that have now been announced to you through those who brought you good news by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look!

¹³ Therefore prepare your minds for action;^a discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. ¹⁴ Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. ¹⁵ Instead, as

he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; ¹⁶ for it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

¹⁷ If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile. ¹⁸ You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. ²⁰ He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. ²¹ Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God.

^a Gk *gird up the loins of your mind*

God, but as the refining of faith. *Revealed* (Gk “apocalypsis”), what is traditionally known as the “second coming.” The promise of Christ’s revelation is repeated seven times in 1 Peter: 1.5,7,12,13,20; 4.13; 5.1. 9: *Salvation of your souls*, 1 Peter tells his audience that they can rejoice because they know that their reward for their faith comes through their unique relationship with God. 10–12: *Prophets who prophesied*, according to 1 Peter, Israel’s prophets (e.g., Isaiah, Jeremiah), inspired by *the Spirit of Christ* (v 11), predicted the Christ’s advent, suffering, and glory, and thus they encourage first-century Christians who were suffering. For the author, like the author of the pesher literature from Qumran, the prophets *testified in advance*, and therefore the meaning of their prophecies can be found by present readers. 11: *Sufferings destined for Christ*, the author might have had in mind Isa 53.1–2; Dan 9.25–27. Nothing in the Tanakh speaks directly of a Messiah (Gk “christos”) suffering. 12: *Holy Spirit sent from heaven*, the Spirit enables people to understand new things (Jn 16.13–14; Acts 10.44–45). *Angels long to look*, believers occupy a perspective greater than that given to the angels. On angels as less privileged, see Heb 1.1–14.

1.13–25: *Holy people*. 13: *Prepare your minds for actions*, lit., “girding the loins of your minds,” see God’s command to the Israelites to “gird your loins” while eating the paschal lamb in Egypt (Ex 12.11). *Grace*, here a reference to salvation, is parallel to the Heb “hesed,” often translated as “lovingkindness.” See Ps 89.3; b. Sot. 14a; Avot de R. Natan A 4, where God’s “hesed” is a model for proper and necessary human behavior. *He is revealed*, see 1.7n. 14: *Children*, God is the “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1.3), and the recipients have become children of God who is “Father”—this language gives readers an intimate identification with Jesus who suffered like them. See Ex 4.22–23; Deut 1.31. *Formerly had*, a reference to the listeners’ former lives before they became Christians, see 4.3. 15–16: *You shall be holy*, confirming God’s command to Israel, Lev 11.44–45; 19.2; 20.7,26. 17: *Invoke as Father*, 1.1–2. *Judges . . . impartially*, various Tanakh texts, including Deut 10.17 and 2 Chr 19.7, emphasize God’s impartiality. *According to their deeds*, Deut 11.13–21; b. Sanh. 90a. 18–19: *Ransomed*, the author contrasts ordinary ransom, a physical life saved through payment of money, and the ransom of Christian believers through the *precious blood of Christ* (see Ps 49.6–8; Mk 10.45; Heb 9.15). *Futile ways . . . ancestors*, referring to the pagan former lives of the recipients. *Precious blood of Christ* is contrasted with *perishable things like silver or gold*. In 1.7, “genuineness of your faith” is contrasted with perishable silver and gold. Suffering Christians are like Christ, a *lamb without defect or blemish*, a perfect sacrifice (see Lev 22.21). For Christ as sacrificial lamb see Jn 1.29; 1 Cor 5.7; Heb 9.5 (interpreting Isa 53.7). 20: *Destined before the foundation of the world*, see Jn 1.1–2. In Prov 3.19–20; 8.22–25,30–31, God created the world with preexistent Wisdom, interpreted by the rabbis as Torah, which served as God’s blueprint for creation (m. Avot 3.14; Lev. Rab. 19.1). *End of the ages*, Jews would have understood “the end of days” to mean the ideal future period, the messianic age (see

ISAIAH’S SUFFERING SERVANT

First Peter 2.22–25, like other New Testament books (Mt 8.17; Acts 8.34–35), quotes and paraphrases verses about the suffering servant from Isa 52.13–53.12 and interprets Isaiah to be referring to Jesus. Isaiah 40–53 includes songs about God’s servant. Most of these explicitly name the servant as the people of Israel, “But you Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen . . .” (Isa 41.8–10; see 44.1–8,21–28; 45.4; 48.20; 54.17), while in others the servant is an unnamed individual (Isa 42.1–7; 49.1–7; 52.13–53.12; and perhaps 50.4–11). Jewish and other interpreters have explained this unnamed servant in several ways: as an individual or a group usually understood to represent the Jewish community in exile, a contemporary of Isaiah, Isaiah himself, or a future figure. For example, *Num. Rab.* 13.2 finds that all verses concerning God’s servant refer to the same figure, the people of Israel. Others note that there are differences be-

tween the poems in the first and second categories, pointing to different identities. According to b. Ber. 5a, while most of the servant poems point to Israel as God’s servant, the anonymous servant in Isa 52–53 represents the righteous people in every generation who suffer for their faith, while the Jewish medieval interpreter R. David Kimchi (1160–1235) suggests that the faithful are the “remnant” (Isa 10.20–22) who survived the Babylonian exile. B. Sot. 14a regards the servant as Moses; the Jewish teacher Sa’adiah Gaon (882–942) sees the servant as Jeremiah, and other prophets and kings have been suggested. Some Jewish sources understand the servant as the Messiah, who will suffer before redeeming Israel and the world (*Tg. Neb.*; b. Sanh. 98b; *Ruth Rab.* 5.6), but when this interpretation was adopted by Christians, it was largely abandoned within the Jewish community, as was Isa 52–53, which never appears as a scriptural reading in the synagogue service.

²² Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth^a so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply^b from the heart.^c ²³ You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.^d ²⁴ For

“All flesh is like grass
and all its glory like the flower of grass.
The grass withers,
and the flower falls,
²⁵ but the word of the Lord endures
forever.”

That word is the good news that was announced to you.

2 Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. ² Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation—³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

- ^a Other ancient authorities add *through the Spirit*
- ^b Or *constantly*
- ^c Other ancient authorities read *a pure heart*
- ^d Or *through the word of the living and enduring God*

Isa 2.1–4; 11.1–10; Ezek 37.24–28); for 1 Peter that time is now, see Gen 49.1; Hab 2.3; Heb 1.2. 22: *Purified your souls*, in the Tanakh, purification is achieved through ritual (in the case of physical impurity, e.g., Lev 11.32) or atonement (in cases of sin, e.g., Ezek 36.33). For 1 Peter, the former beliefs and practices of the listeners made them “impure” and the author declares that their obedience purifies their souls. *Love one another*, Lev 19.18,34; Mt 22.37–40; 1 Cor 13.1–13; m. Avot 1.12. See “The Concept of Neighbor,” p. 645. 23: *Born anew*, the choice of Christian life and faith is understood by 1 Peter to be a kind of rebirth (see 1.3; 2.2; Jn 3.1–8). Similarly, conversion to Judaism is seen as rebirth, b. Yebam. 62a. *Imperishable seed*, see 1 Cor 15.37–50, an allusion to the resurrected body here understood as spiritually present. Similarly faith is an “imperishable inheritance” (1.4). 24–25: Isa 40.6–8 is interpreted according to the key in 1.10–12 to speak directly to the readers. Isa 40.1–6 speaks of the end of suffering and God’s revelation in glory, and Isa 40.9 calls for an announcement of the good news, images used in 1 Peter. *Good news*, Gk “euangellos,” whence “evangelical.”

2.1–12: *People of God*. 1: *Malice . . . guile*, conventional vice list (see also 2.1; 4.3,15; 1 Cor 6.9–11; Gal 5.19–21). 2: *Newborn infants*, see 1.23n. *Spiritual milk*, that is, “milk of God’s word” (Gk “logos”), an important theme (1.23; 2.8; 3.1). For Torah as milk, see e.g., *Song Rab.* 1.3. 3: *Tasted . . . good*, see Ps 34.8,

⁴ Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and ⁵ like living stones, let yourselves be built^a into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For it stands in scripture:

"See, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious;
and whoever believes in him^b will not be
put to shame."

⁷ To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe,

"The stone that the builders rejected
has become the very head of the
corner,"

⁸ and

"A stone that makes them stumble,
and a rock that makes them fall."

They stumble because they disobey the word,
as they were destined to do.

"O taste and see that the LORD is good . . ." The Psalm concerns relying on God to protect and save one who suffers, the central theme of 1 Peter. 4–6: *Living stone*, the *cornerstone* of v 6; citing Isa 28.16, the author understands the cornerstone to be Christ (contrast *Lev. Rab.* 17.7; *Deut. Rab.* 3.13 where the stone in Isa 28.16 is the cornerstone of the rebuilt Temple); Christians are like Jesus: *rejected* by others but *precious* to God, themselves acting as *living stones* by living their faith and showing themselves to be *God's people* (2.10). 5: *Holy priesthood*, Ex 19.6 (see also 1 Pet 2.9). *Spiritual sacrifices*, lives of faith and holiness. There is no need for physical sacrifices, such as would be performed in the Jerusalem Temple (likely destroyed before the composition of the letter). 7: *The stone that the builders rejected*, Ps 118.22, interpreted by most Jewish commentaries as a reference to the people of Israel (Rashi [1040–1105], Ibn Ezra [1089–1167], R. David Kimchi [1160–1235]). 8: *A stone that makes them stumble*, Isa 8.14. Paul (Rom 9.33) uses Isa 8.14 to distinguish between Jewish and Gentile responses to Christ, but 1 Peter contrasts the Christian life of faith with the Gentile lives that believers have left behind. Some rabbinic texts interpret the *stone* in Ps 118.22 and Isa 8.14 as the Messiah, see *b. Sanh.* 38a; *Midr. Tann. Deut.* 1.17; *Ex. Rab.* 17.1. *Destined to do*, 1 Peter suggests Christian believers have been chosen/destined to believe. Here non-believers are described as equally destined to disobey. 9: *A chosen race*, a *royal priesthood*, Ex 19.6; see Isa 43.20–21. This is the only place in the NT where "race" applies to Christians, and the only place where race (Gk "genos"), nation, (Gk "ethnos"), and people (Gk "laos") appear together. *Nation* (Gk "ethnos"; Heb "goy"), can refer to other nations (Ex 34.24; Lev 18.24; Deut 7.6–7), but is sometimes used for Israel (Deut 4.8; Josh 3.17). This appropriation of Ex 19.6 (in v 9) and Hos 2.23 (in v 10) represents replacement theology, suggesting that Christians replace Israel as God's chosen people. Several second-century Christian writers speak of Christians as a "race" (*Epistle to Diognetus* 1; Clement, *Strom.* 5.14.98.4) and as a "third race" (Clement, *Strom.* 6.5.41.6–7; Pseudo-Cyprian, *De Pascha Computus* 17; Tertullian, *Ad Nationes* 7–8). *Called you out of darkness*, Isa 9.2; 42.16. 10: *Once you were not a people . . . God's people*, Hos. 2.23. The recipients are Gentiles who see themselves as Israel. In vv 4–10, verses from the Tanakh are strung together to create a series of images: living stones, spiritual house, holy priesthood, cornerstone. Jewish interpretation takes these verses to point to God's unbroken covenant with Israel. 11: *Beloved*, though seen as outsiders by society, the listeners are at home as Christians, see 1.22; 4.12 (cf. Rom 1.7; 12.19; 1 Cor 10.14; 15.58). In the Tanakh, God chooses and loves Israel, Deut 7.6–8; Hos 11.1; on human beings generally, and Israel specifically as beloved by God, see *m. Avot* 3.14; *Avot de R. Nathan* B 43. *Aliens and exiles*, see 1.17. *Desires of the flesh*, referring to sensual rather than spiritual matters, see Gal 5.16–18; Rom 8.5. 12: *Gentiles*, the recipients are contrasted with

⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people,^c in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

¹⁰ Once you were not a people,
but now you are God's people;
once you had not received mercy,
but now you have received mercy.

¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul. ¹² Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.^d

^a Or you yourselves are being built

^b Or it

^c Gk a people for his possession

^d Gk God on the day of visitation

¹³ For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution,^a whether of the emperor as supreme,¹⁴ or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right.

¹⁵ For it is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish.

¹⁶ As servants^b of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. ¹⁷ Honor everyone. Love the family of believers.^c Fear God. Honor the emperor.

¹⁸ Slaves, accept the authority of your masters with all deference, not only those who are kind and gentle but also those who are harsh. ¹⁹ For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. ²⁰ If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for

it, you have God's approval. ²¹ For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.

²² "He committed no sin,

and no deceit was found in his mouth."

²³ When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. ²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross,^d so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds^e

^a Or every institution ordained for human beings

^b Gk slaves

^c Gk Love the brotherhood

^d Or carried up our sins in his body to the tree

^e Gk bruise

Gentiles (lit., "nations" [Gk "ethnos"]) because they now see themselves as Israel. *Malign you as evildoers*, since there is no evidence of empire-wide persecution of Christians before the 250s, this is most likely a reference to local slander (see 3.9.16). Conduct that Christians believe is honorable is seen by others as offensive and superstitious. 1 Peter teaches that Christian behavior must be beyond reproach.

2.13–4.11: *Household codes*. "Haustafeln" (rules for the household), also found in Eph 5.22–6.9; Col 3.18–4.1; Titus 2.1–10, are based on Greco-Roman ideas of the proper order in the household and society (see also Aristotle, *Pol.* 1253b.1–14; *Eth. nic.* V.1134b; Philo, *Spec. Laws* 3.137–40). The author of 1 Peter, concerned about accusations of immorality and subversion of authority, shows that this new religion is no societal threat, but it rather insists on being properly submissive to hierarchical authority.

2.13–17: *Obedience to rulers*. 13: *Accept the authority of every human institution*, *m. Avot* 3.2 "Pray for the welfare of the government, for were it not for the fear of it, a person would swallow his friend alive," demands a similar respect for political authority (see *b. B. Kamma* 113a). 16: *Servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil*, *m. Avot* 6.2 teaches that true freedom is in serving God. For 1 Peter, freedom is not antinomianism; while the government has no actual authority over Christians (they are servants of God—not of human rulers), it is right and moral to be submissive to governing authorities. 17: *Love the family of believers*, love in 1 Peter is directed internally, toward Christ and Christian community members: 1.8,22; 2.11; 3.8; 4.8,12; 5.14. *Fear God*, God is to be feared (Ps 111.10), while outsiders are only to be honored. *Honor the emperor*, the author offers no command to resist for religious principles and so may be suggesting that Christians even participate in pagan political rites, since God knows what is in their hearts.

2.18–25: *Obedience of servant to master*. For this author, slavery, abuse, and suffering are made meaningful when informed by Christ's passion (v 23) as interpreted through Isa 53.22,24–25 (see 1.10–11nn.). 18: *Masters* (Gk "despotes"), the author gives instructions to slaves, but not masters, perhaps indicating that only the slaves are Christian. 21: *Christ also suffered for you*, Christians who suffer in the present have Christ with whom they can identify. *Example*, Christ's suffering is the example for Christians; suffering Jews have looked to others, e.g., the example of the steadfast faith of Abraham and Isaac (Gen 22). 22: Isa 53.9. See "Isaiah's Suffering Servant," p. 503. 23: *Entrusted himself*, see 1.21. 24: *Bore our sins*, either substitutionary atonement, the idea that Christ took upon himself the punishment for human sin (2 Cor 5.21), or meaning that Christ caused sin to be erased through the faith that he showed on the cross (Col 2.13–15). See Isa 53.4–5, "he has borne our infirmities . . . crushed for our iniquities." *Have been healed*, Christ's wounds heal the wounded, suffering believers; see Isa 53.5, "by his bruises we are healed." 25: *Going astray like sheep*, Isa 53.6; see also Jer 50.6; Ps 119.176. *Shepherd*,

SUFFERING UNDER PERSECUTION

First Peter guides suffering Christians to see themselves as imitating Christ, who also suffered unjustly, and to understand that suffering results from the temporary power of the devil, whose evil will be overcome by Christ when he returns (3.18–20; 5.8). At that time, those who have suffered for their faith will receive the reward of eternal glory (1.7; 2.11; 4.13; 5.4,10–11). Later stories of Christian martyrs used similar images in their insistence that the person who appears to be the victim will ultimately be the victor (e.g., Ignatius, *To the Romans* 4–5; 8; *Mart. Pol.* 9.11,14; *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas* 4,10,18,20). The concept of suffering and death as redemptive can be seen in the stories of the Jewish Maccabean martyrs, who suffered for refusing to compromise their commitment to Torah during the second-century BCE persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes (2 Macc 6–7; 4 Macc 1–18). An old scribe named Elazar who refused to eat pork accepted torture and death, and so he left “in his death an example of nobility and

you have been healed.²⁵ For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

3 Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands, so that, even if some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives’ conduct,² when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.³ Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair, and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing;⁴ rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God’s

in Isa 53.6 the servant himself or the covenant community; here, the Christ, who is also the sacrificial lamb (1 Cor 5.7). *Guardian of your souls*, God is the faithful guardian, Ezek 34.15.

3.1–7: Marital relationships. 1: *Authority*, husbands, like emperors and masters of slaves, are to be given authority “for the Lord’s sake” (2.13). *Do not obey the word*, instruction to women married to non-Christian men. 3: *Do not adorn yourselves*, similarly, Maimonides (1135–1204) interpreted Ps 45.14 to discourage female adornment and assertive behavior (*Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Marriage 13.14). 5: *Holy women*, recipients of the letter should be holy just as God is holy (1.15–16), appropriating the Jewish tradition of being a “holy nation” (2.9). Of these women, only Sarah (v 6) is mentioned. 6: *Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him lord*, Gen 18.12, Sarah refers to Abraham as her “lord” (Heb “*adon*”) but the context is her laughing in disbelief that she and Abraham will have a child at their advanced ages. No verse in Genesis indicates that “Sarah obeyed Abraham,” and in fact, God tells Abraham to obey Sarah (Gen 21.12). *Her daughters*, in Jewish tradition, converts are called daughters/sons of Sarah and Abraham, who were

a memorial of courage, not only to the young but to the great body of his nation” (1 Macc 6.31). Seven brothers and their mother were tortured and killed one by one for refusing “to transgress the laws of our ancestors” (1 Macc 7.2). Similar stories are told in later sources about rabbinic sages such as R. Akiva (*b. Ber.* 61b) and R. Hanina ben Teradion (*b. Avod. Zar.* 17b) who were tortured and killed by Roman authorities because they persisted in teaching Torah in public. These narratives, together with the Binding (Heb *Akedah*) of Isaac (Gen 22), served as models for Jews who were killed during the crusades and who suffered in other persecutions throughout the centuries. Recognizing that there were righteous people who suffered, some rabbis even interpreted suffering as a sign of God’s love. Interpreting Ps 94.12 “Happy are those whom you discipline, O Lord, and whom you teach out of your law” as a reference to “chastenings of love” (Heb *yissurin shel ahavah*), these rabbis suggested that suffering was not a sign of God’s displeasure, but of divine favor (*b. Ber.* 5a).

sight.⁵ It was in this way long ago that the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves by accepting the authority of their husbands.⁶ Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him lord. You have become her daughters as long as you do what is good and never let fears alarm you.

⁷ Husbands, in the same way, show consideration for your wives in your life together, paying honor to the woman as the weaker sex,^a since they too are also heirs of the gracious gift of life—so that nothing may hinder your prayers.

^a Gk vessel

⁸ Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind.⁹ Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing.¹⁰ For

“Those who desire life
and desire to see good days,
let them keep their tongues from evil
and their lips from speaking deceit;
“let them turn away from evil and do
good;
let them seek peace and pursue it.
“For the eyes of the Lord are on the
righteous,
and his ears are open to their prayer.
But the face of the Lord is against those
who do evil.”

¹³ Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear,^a and do not be intimidated,¹⁵ but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your

defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you;¹⁶ yet do it with gentleness and reverence.^b Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God’s will, than to suffer for doing evil.¹⁸ For Christ also suffered^c for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you^d to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit,¹⁹ in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison,²⁰ who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water.²¹ And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from

^a Gk *their fear*

^b Or *respect*

^c Other ancient authorities read *died*

^d Other ancient authorities read *us*

considered the first converts (*b. Sukk.* 49b; *Num. Rab.* 8.9). For Paul, faith makes one a descendent of Abraham and Sarah (Rom 4.13–25; Gal 4.21–30). 7: *Show consideration*, submission is not expected from men (see Eph 5.22), but they must show honor to their wives. *Weaker sex*, a lower order than men, this idea appears in Greco-Roman and Jewish traditions (Aristotle, *Pol.* 1.1254b,1259b; *b. Nidd.* 31b; *b. Men.* 43b).

3.8–17: Love one another and do good in the face of evil. All believers should act with love (see Rom 12.9–18; 1 Cor 13), and even when treated unfairly, with obedience and kindness (see Mt 5.38–42; Lk 6.29–31; Rom 12.19–21). 10–12: The author quotes Ps 34.12–16 (see 2.22 where the same verses are interpreted in reference to Christ) to teach that proper behavior leads to eschatological promises. 13: *Eager to do what is good*, *m. Avot* 1.3; 5.16, “Any love that is dependent on something, when that thing perishes, the love perishes. But [a love] that is not dependent on something, does not ever perish.” 14: *Suffer . . . blessed*, *b. Ber.* 5a, “If he did attribute [suffering] to [sin] and still did not find [anything amiss], let him be sure that these are the chastenings of love.” 15: *Sanctify Christ*, see Isa 8.12–13 (Isa 8.14 is quoted in 2.8), where God’s holiness shields against the prophet’s fear of the negative reactions to his words. Here too, the author assures listeners that their faith in Christ will strengthen them to defend themselves when accused of wrongdoing. *Defense*, Gk “*apologia*,” a legal defense or a general response to slander. 17: *Suffering should be God’s will*, *b. Qidd.* 39b (“It was Rabbi Jacob who said, ‘There is no reward for fulfilling a command in this world’”); *b. Ber.* 5a; *y. Sot.* 5.5.

3.18–22: Christ suffered to bring eternal life. 18: *Made alive in the spirit*, this contrast between flesh and spirit fits with the contrast between stones and spiritual stones in ch 2. Flesh is limitation, suffering and death; spirit is power, vindication, and new life. 19: *Spirits in prison*, while perhaps a reference to the “watchers” who in Gen 6.1–4 consorted with the daughters of men, and according to 1 En. 10 were locked in prison as punishment (see also 2 Pet 2.4); more likely a reference to those who had died prior to the salvation offered by the cross. The event became known as “the harrowing of hell.” 20: *Waited patiently*, according to postbiblical tradition, God waited for humanity to repent before bringing on the flood, see Philo, *QG* 11.13; Josephus, *Ant.* 1.3.74; *Gen. Rab.* 30.7. *Eight persons*, God saved only Noah’s family (Gen 6–8), similarly, non-believers will not survive. *Saved through water*, Noah’s

the body, but as an appeal to God for^a a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

4 Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh,^b arm yourselves also with the same intention (for whoever has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin),² so as to live for the rest of your earthly life^c no longer by human desires but by the will of God.³ You have already spent enough time in doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry.⁴ They are surprised that you no longer join them in the same excesses of dissipation, and so they blaspheme.^d ⁵ But they will have to give an accounting to him who stands ready to judge the living and the dead.⁶ For this is the reason the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead, so that, though they had been judged in the flesh as everyone is judged, they might live in the spirit as God does.

family was physically saved from the water through God's instruction to build an ark, and Christians are spiritually saved through the water of baptism. 21: *Baptism*, Mt 28.19; Acts 2.28; Rom 6.3–6 (see “Baptism and Eucharist,” p. 674). *Prefigured*, Gk “antitypos,” the flood is the “type” or model for that which comes later, in this case, baptism. *Appeal to God . . . conscience*, baptism is not a mere ritual, but it is meant to be grounded in a connection to God. See 2.19 and 3.16—in 2.19, conscience is the source of hope in God; in 3.16 it leads to opponents being shamed in God's judgment. See also Heb 10.22–23. 22: *Gone into heaven*, Mk 16.19; Acts 2.32–33; Rom 8.34. *Right hand of God*, see Ps 110; Heb 1.3,13. In some early Jewish mystical literature (the *Hekhalot* texts), the right hand of God is implicitly identified with the angel Metatron. *Angels, authorities, and powers*, all of creation is now subject to Christ. In contrast to the powerless Christians, Christ has already achieved victory through and so over his sufferings.

4.1–6: *Rejection of former life*. 1: *Same intention*, which they share with Christ, namely *the will of God* (4.2). *Finished with sin*, in choosing to suffer in order to battle “earthly desires,” readers choose righteousness rather than sin. 3: *Gentiles* (Gk “ethnos”), or pagans. *Licentiousness . . . idolatry*, contrast between “you” and “the Gentiles,” see, e.g., Lev 18.24–30, where the children of Israel are warned about the sinful behaviors of the Canaanites. 4: *Blaspheme*, they speak irreverently about God when they slander Christians who no longer join them in their ways. 5: *Give an accounting*, the reference here seems to be to the final judgment in heaven; in rabbinic literature the day of judgment is Rosh Ha-Shanah (New Year), t. *Rosh Ha-Shanah* 1.11–13. 6: *Gospel was proclaimed even to the dead*, possibly a second reference to the “harrowing of hell” (3.19), but more likely a reference to those who heard the gospel proclaimed but initially rejected it. Lk 16.26 indicates that repenting and gaining salvation after death is impossible, but see Dan 12.1–3; 2 Macc 12.43–45; Jn 5.25–29; 1 Cor 15.9. *Live in the spirit*, believers who have suffered like Christ will ultimately be vindicated, like Christ. Another interpretation: Christians will live by the standard of God's spirit, rather than the standards of the flesh, those who slander Christians.

4.7–11: *Ethical exhortations*. 7: *Be serious and discipline yourselves*, lit., “think wisely and be sober,” see the similar calls to be sober in 1.13; 5.18. *For the sake of your prayers*, wisdom and sobriety are preconditions for prayer (see 3.7,12; *Lev. Rab.* 12.1), or wisdom and sobriety will bring one to pray. 8: *Love for one another*, see 1.22. *Love covers a multitude of sins*, see Ps 32.1; Prov 10.12; Jas 5.20. 10: *Gift*, see 1 Cor 12–13

⁷ The end of all things is near;^e therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers.⁸ Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins.⁹ Be hospitable to one another without complaining.¹⁰ Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.¹¹ Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

^a Or *a pledge to God from*

^b Other ancient authorities add *for us*; others, *for you*

^c Gk *rest of the time in the flesh*

^d Or *they malign you*

^e Or *is at hand*

¹² Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.¹³ But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed.¹⁴ If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory,^a which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.^b ¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker.¹⁶ Yet if any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear this name.¹⁷ For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God; if it begins with us, what will be the end for those who do not obey the gospel of God?¹⁸ And

“If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinners?”

¹⁹ Therefore, let those suffering in accordance with God's will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good.

5 Now as an elder myself and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you² to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight,^c not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it^d—not for sordid gain but eagerly.³ Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock.⁴ And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away.⁵ In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders.⁶ And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for

^a Other ancient authorities add *and of power*

^b Other ancient authorities add *On their part he is blasphemed, but on your part he is glorified*

^c Other ancient authorities lack *exercising the oversight*

^d Other ancient authorities lack *as God would have you do it*

^e Or *of those who are older*

where Paul insists that believers must use their individual gifts for the good of the whole community. 11: *Glory and the power*, a doxology (word of glory), often found at the end of songs, liturgies, or books of the Bible, Ex 15.18; Ps 41.13; 146.10; Rom 16.27; 1 Pet 5.11. The Kaddish prayer at the end of Jewish prayer services, which developed in the later rabbinic period, similarly functions as a doxology.

4.12–19: *Enduring trials*. *Fiery ordeal . . . to test you*, possibly a reference to martyrdom, but more likely to a general suffering that tested the faith of believers, see Zech 13.9; Ps 66.10; Prov 17.3; Job 23.10; *Gen. Rab.* 55.1; b. *Ber.* 5a. 13: *Sharing Christ's sufferings*, in your own suffering you are imitating Christ, 2.21–25; 3.18. The Gk “koinoneo,” meaning sharing, is the same term that is used for mutuality and sharing in the Lord's Supper, 1 Cor 10.16. 14: *Reviled for the name of Christ*, see Mt 5.11–12. 16: *Christian*, the term only appears two other times in the NT, both in Acts (11.26; 26.28). Accusations of illegal or immoral behavior based on being identified as “Christian” were known around 110 according to the letters between Pliny the Younger and the Emperor Trajan. The author of 1 Peter encourages Christians to feel pride in this designation, rather than shame. 17: *Household of God*, the church, extending the imagery from the household codes (2.18–3.12). *Gospel of God*, see Rom 1.1. 18: See Prov 11.31[LXX]. 19: *Faithful Creator*, the only place where the NT refers to God as creator, meaning that God controls all of history from the beginning of time until the end of days. (See similar ideas in Isa 45.6–7; Ex. *Rab.* 21.6.) Readers are told that they can and should be faithful and trust in this “faithful Creator.”

5.1–14: *Final instructions*. 1: *Elder*, Gk “sympresbyteros,” lit., “co-elder.” *Witness of the sufferings of Christ*, the author claims to have witnessed Christ's suffering, establishing his authority as an apostle. *Elders*, for elders as pastors/shepherds, see Acts 20; 1 Tim 3.1–7; Titus 1.5–9; 1 Clem. 4.43. According to 1 Peter, elders are shepherds of the people, compared to the *chief shepherd* (5.4) who is *shepherd and guardian of your souls* (2.25). In Jewish tradition also, the term “elder” was not only an indication of age, but also of wisdom and leadership, t. *Meg.* 3.24; *Sifra Kedoshim* 7.12. 2: *Not for sordid gain*, elders are caretakers, not masters, thus they should lead generously, with humility. 4: *Crown of glory*, see 1.4. 5–6: On being subject to the authority see 2.13,18; 3.1,5,22. *God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble*, Prov 3.34[LXX]. The previous verse (Prov 3.33) shares the contrast between God's house and those outside it as in, 1Pet 4.17. 6: *Humble yourselves*, Mic 6.8; Ps 22.7; m. *Avot* 4.4 (“Rabbi Levitas

“God opposes the proud,
but gives grace to the humble.”

⁶ Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. ⁸ Discipline yourselves, keep alert. ^a Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters^b in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. ¹⁰ And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support,

strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.

¹² Through Silvanus, whom I consider a faithful brother, I have written this short letter to encourage you and to testify that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it. ¹³ Your sister church^c in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings; and so does my son Mark. ¹⁴ Greet one another with a kiss of love.

Peace to all of you who are in Christ.^d

^a Or *be vigilant*

^b Gk *your brotherhood*

^c Gk *She who is*

^d Other ancient authorities add *Amen*

of Yavneh said, “Be very very humble, for the anticipated end of a mortal is worms”). *Hand of God*, recognition of God’s power should lead to humility. 8: *Discipline yourselves*, lit., “be sober” (1.13; 4.7). *Keep alert*, Mk 13.34; 1 Thess 5.6. *Roaring lion*, Ps 22.13. *The devil*, signifying either the non-believing oppressors, or the inner desire to express anger, to sin, or to lose faith (see “Supernatural Beings,” p. 682). 9: *Brothers and sisters in all the world*, this community is not alone in their suffering, although there was no empire-wide persecution of Christians until ca. 250 under the emperor Decius. 12: *Silvanus* may have been Peter’s scribe and so editor, or the carrier, of the letter, see Acts 15–16; 1 Cor 15.21; Gal 5.11; Col 4.18; 1 Thess 1.1. 13: *Sister church*, Gk “syneklekte,” lit., “she that was chosen together” or “co-elect”; the term “church” is not used, and some scholars suggest the author is referring to an actual woman (perhaps in charge of a house church). See 1.2. *Babylon*, a symbol for Rome, the capital of the empire (see Rev 14.8). With this reminder of the site of the exile of the Judeans, the author identifies with Christians whose suffering makes them feel that they are in exile (1.1). *My son Mark*, traditionally understood as the evangelist Mark, thought to be Peter’s disciple (Acts 12–13; 15). For disciple as son, see *m. B. Metz.* 2.11; *Sifre Deut.* 34.3; *Lev. Rab.* 11.7. 14: *Kiss*, Rom 16.16; 1 Cor 16.20; 2 Cor 13.12; 1 Thess 5.26. *Peace to all*, throughout this letter, the author called readers to create communities of love and peace (1.22; 2.17; 3.8; 4.7), see also Eph 6.23–24.

THE SECOND LETTER OF PETER

This is the second epistle attributed to Peter, one of the twelve apostles and a leader of the church during its early decades. It belongs to the genre of “testament” (see, e.g., Gen 49; Deut 33; Tob. 14; Acts 20.17–38; the *T. 12 Patr.*; *T. Abr.*), in which the author gives the essence of his teaching, reveals his approaching death, and predicts the future. The letter is addressed to Jesus’ followers, and its major points are to encourage fidelity and to warn against false prophets and evil people.

Most scholars agree that the apostle Peter, who according to Church tradition died ca. 64 (1 *Clem.* 5), did not write this epistle; the author uses a vocabulary that indicates a high degree of literacy; it is unlikely to have been written by a Galilean fisherman whose primary language was Aramaic. Thus the text is pseudepigraphic—a follower composed it in his name. Likely the author depended on the Epistle of Jude for materials concerning the final judgment, although 2 Peter omits references to 1 *Enoch* and the *Testament of Moses*, perhaps seeing them as “cleverly devised myths” (1.16, and see Titus 1.14 on “Jewish myths”). Scholars also debate whether 2 Peter is a genuine letter: the address is generic, and it lacks the traditional epistolary thanksgiving section. Originally it may have been a sermon. A general allusion to 1 Pet 3.1 is used to establish apostolic authority, though it is clear from the vocabulary and style that the person who wrote 1 Peter did not write 2 Peter. Because 2 Peter mentions Paul’s epistles, names Paul “our beloved brother” (3.15), seems to know Paul’s letters (3.16), and borrows from the Epistle of Jude, some scholars suggest that it should be dated to the first half of the second century; while the early second-century church father Clement of Alexandria cites Jude (*Strom.* 3.2), 2 Peter is not cited until the mid-century *Apocalypse of Peter*. Thus 2 Peter is probably one of the latest books in the New Testament. The fourth-century Christian historian Eusebius lists it, together with Jude, as a “disputed book” (*Hist. eccl.* 3.25.3).

It is uncertain when 2 Peter became part of the New Testament. No church writer displays knowledge of this book until the beginning of the third century, but by the time of Jerome (ca. 346–420), most had accepted it as canonical. Origen (ca. 185–ca. 254), the first church father to mention the letter, indicates that its Petrine authorship was already disputed (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.25.8). The earliest existing manuscript of the epistle is Bodmer papyrus P.72, from the third or fourth century.

CONTENTS

The first chapter describes the virtues worthy of those who believe in Christ, refers to the apostle’s approaching death, and promotes the heavenly choice of Jesus as the Son of God. The second chapter describes the false teachers, the sins of the church’s enemies, and the results of their works. The third chapter discusses the promise of the return of Jesus, comments on those who question whether this second coming will occur, and reinforces the need to await the end-time with patience and righteousness.

Though 2 Peter does not refer directly to Jews or Judaism, it uses themes from the Tanakh, such as Noah and the flood (2.5), Lot and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (2.6), and Balaam (2.15–16). The epistle also seems to be familiar with views found in some rabbinic sources such as the righteousness of Lot and the greediness of Balaam (see “Balaam in Jewish and Christian Tradition,” p. 514).

The intended audience may be Gentile followers of Jesus, as implied by the distinction made in the opening words: “to those who have received a faith as precious as ours” (1.1). The sentence may, however, speak only of shared belief, without the implication of ethnicity or different belief. The author’s opponents seem to be members or former members of the church, who deny the second coming and the final judgment (3.3–7). Second Peter attacks their views as well as their immoral behavior—much of this attack appears also in the book of Jude, which most scholars believe to be earlier.

Gila Vachman