

2 Peter (November 17)

Reading 2 Peter

He pushed the end of the stick through the pile of ashes as he held his hand above them. He could see no smoke and could feel no heat. The fire, it seemed, had burned itself out completely and would not return. He began to think about what he might eat that did not need to be cooked. And as he thought, he saw it – the wink of a bright red coal stirred to life when the ashes were pushed away. There would be fire. The glimmering coal produced a crackling, roaring hearth.

Persecution and the mockery of false teachers had dampened the hopes of the early Christians. Scoffers insisted that the fires of judgement were out and that Christ would not return as the apostles had preached. Peter wrote this letter not long before his death to remind his readers of the Lord's patience, the certainty of fiery punishment for the wicked, and the sure promise of eternal life for all who believe.

Author and Date

The author identifies himself as Simon Peter. He uses the first person singular pronoun in a highly personal passage and claims to be an eyewitness of the transfiguration. He asserts that this is his second letter to the readers and refers to Paul as "our dear brother." In short, the letter claims to be Peter's, and its character is compatible with that claim.

In recent centuries, however, its genuineness has been challenged by a considerable number of scholars. One of the objections that has been raised is the difference in style from that of 1 Peter. The differences that do exist may be accounted for by variations in subject matter, in the form and purpose of the letters, in the time and circumstances of writing, in source or models, and in scribes that may have been employed. Perhaps most significant is the statement in 1 Peter 5:12 that Silas assisted in the writing of 1 Peter. No such statement is made concerning 2 Peter, which may explain its noticeable difference in style.

2 Peter was written toward the end of Peter's life, after he had written a prior letter to the same readers (probably 1 Peter). Since Peter was martyred during the reign of Nero, his death must have occurred prior to AD 68, so it is very likely that he wrote 2 Peter between 65 and 68.

Purpose

In his first letter Peter feeds Christ's sheep by instructing them how to deal with persecution from outside the church; in this second letter he teaches them how to deal with false teachers and evildoers who have come into the church. While the particular situations naturally call for variations in content and emphasis, in both letters Peter as a pastor ("shepherd") of Christ's sheep seeks to comment to his readers a wholesome combination of Christian faith and practice. More specifically, his purpose is threefold: to stimulate Christian growth; to combat false teaching; and to encourage watchfulness in view of the Lord's certain return.

Blessings for Readers

Peter addresses four key areas of Christian teaching: knowledge of the Lord and the problem of forgetfulness; true godliness and piety; God's gifts (faith, promises, Holy Scripture); and the end times. He guides readers to resist the appeals of false teachers, since everyone will face the Lord as judge when he returns.

As you read 2 Peter, consider the state of your faith and the character of your life. Commit your ways to the Lord by practicing daily repentance and praying for Christ's return. Through this sure prophetic word, you will grow in the grace and knowledge of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.