

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION TO 2 PETER

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No epistle of the New Testament (Thiessen) “*has earlier or stronger attestation than 1 Peter,*” while (Moorehead) “*the Second Epistle of Peter comes to us with less historical support of its genuineness than any other book of the New Testament.*”

I. Attestations to the Existence of 2 Peter by Points of Resemblance and Quotation

- A. *Shepherd of Hermas*
- B. 1 Clement
- C. 2 Clement
- D. *Didache*
- E. Perhaps known to Clement of Alexandria (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6:14:1)
- F. Irenaeus makes no clear allusion to 2 Peter, but the churches of Vienna and Lyons he was associated with seem to have known it (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6:1:36, 45, 55).
- G. *Apocalypse of Peter* apparently quotes from it.
- H. Eusebius seems to have accepted it as did many others. He places it in the disputed (ἀντιλεγόμενα), not the spurious (νόθα).
- I. “*No evidence before the time of Origen that 2 Peter was accepted anywhere in the church as a writing of equal rank as 1 Peter*” (Zahn)
- J. Muratorian fragment does not contain it (neither does it contain 1 Peter, which was among the ὁμολεγούμενα).
- K. The Old Syriac lacks it.
- L. The Old Latin lacks it.

Zahn: “*We have attestation by quotation in Jude.*” Of course, this hinges on whether Jude’s uses 2 Peter or *vice versa*.

II. Reasons the Epistle Was Not Mentioned Much

- A. The epistle is brief (the same is true of Jude, 2 and 3 John, which are not frequently mentioned).
- B. It contains little that is new (in contrast to 1 Peter, which mentions the “preaching in Hades.” This also relates to the fact that it is written in a period later than most New Testament books.)
- C. It is not directed to a specific person or church.

III. Internal Evidence of Authorship

A. 1:1: Simon Peter

That this is a later interpolation has no manuscript support.

B. That the letter is a forgery is unlikely:

1. Dods observes, “*There is no Christian document of value written by a forger who uses the name of an apostle.*”

2. Lumby says, “*It is almost inconceivable that a forger, writing to warn against false teachers, writing in the interest of truth, should thus have assumed deliberately a name and experience to which he had no claim.*” That argument defends the whole Christian system; its original proponents were not liars, because what they sought to propound was concerned with important truth. A forger we may expect to have personal interests or interests apart from truth. But unseemly differences do exist between personal acts and beliefs.

3. The difference in style between the two epistles prompts Thiessen to ask, “*Would a forger risk detection by neglecting closer attention to the style and language of 1 Peter?*”

4. Pseudonymity would have a purpose if some new or peculiar doctrine were involved, but 2 Peter contains nothing doctrinally distinctive. Biggs asks as well, “*What motive would there be for pseudonymous composition?*”

a. It is not unorthodox

b. It is not a romance: it does not expand on the facts of the gospel or the life of Christ—a matter that might feed a forger’s ego in seeing his own doctrine become part of Christianity.

c. It tells nothing new about Peter.

(1) Transfiguration (1:16-18 also in gospels)

(2) *Martyrdom of Peter* (1:12-14 appears only in John (21:18-19), which was written later)

(3) “*Noah, a preacher of righteousness*” (2:5) has already come up in an interesting way. New material is a problem: if it is new, we could suppose that a forger wanted to introduce it; if it is not new, a forger copied it. But if it is new, it may be true, and if it is not new, it may be true also; that is:

(a) The writer wanted this unrecorded truth to be known better. Where did the forger get it? The evolutionary presupposition comes into play here as well as anywhere else.)

(b) Since it is not new, it could not be the motive of a forger to introduce it; so the whole issue about newness does not help either side of the question about forgeries.

5. It contains no anachronisms (at least none that are indisputable).

IV. Date of Writing: 66-67

A. The reference to Paul's epistles (3:15, 16) does not mean

1. that all his epistles were collected,
2. or even that they had all been written,
3. or even that the readers knew all that were written,
4. or that the ones Peter refers to contain the same subject Peter addresses.

B. Written after 1 Peter (3:1)

C. Written before Jude

1. Peter speaks of the false teachers as in some sense yet future (2:1, 2, 3, 12ff), while Jude speaks of them as present—assuming common destination for 2 Peter and Jude. Thiessen denies that Jude and 2 Peter had the same destination.

2. Jude seems to allude in verses 17 and 18 to 2 Peter 3:1-3.

- a. The word *mockers* (ἐμπακτής) is found only in these two references.
- b. The wording is much the same.
- c. 2 Peter 3:1-3 (Paul's warning in Acts 20:29, 30; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:1-5 could account for Jude's saying "*the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . said to you*," for these statements all were made to people of Asia Minor—assuming Jude [17-18] was addressed to Asia Minor).

D. 2 Peter was written near the end of Peter's life (1:14).

2 Peter 3:2 also speaks of the apostles who had spoken to them before this second Petrine epistle, but the reference there seems to be to the general teaching of the apostles, which as a body of doctrine they were to receive in opposition to new teaching.

V. Reasons Given for Peter's Copying from Jude Rather Than *vice versa* (Contrast below under VI.)

A. Virtually all of Jude is contained in 2 Peter.

B. Jude is intelligible without 2 Peter while certain sentences of 2 Peter require a knowledge of Jude to be clear.

1. "Angels" in 2 Peter 2:11 is unintelligible without the reference to Michael in Jude 9.
2. 2 Peter 2:17 needs the reference to the stars in Jude 13 to make sense. Moreover, the author mixes up Jude's imagery: it is more appropriate for Jude's wandering stars to be imprisoned in darkness than for waterless springs!

3. 2 Peter improves Jude's chronology in the sequence of angels, flood, Sodom and Gomorrah (Jude 5-7). But the point is not to be chronological but to have examples for the thought at hand.

4. He overcomes the judgment theme in Jude by emphasizing the rescue of the faithful ones. But Jude is the one who does this. Furthermore, if Jude is written after 2 Peter, when the false teaching is more rampant, a judgment is even more appropriate and necessary.

5. Peter makes out of the general reference of Jude 17, 18 a specific one by adopting the high authority of the apostle Peter.

6. Peter forgets his own Petrine stature in adopting Jude 17 in the awkward Greek of 2 Peter 3:2. Could this be turned around to prove that Jude copied from 2 Peter and improved his style?

C. Later, it would have been purposeless to reconstruct—from hints in Jude and from imagination—a lost prophetic writing cited by Jude concerning future errors that according to Jude were fulfilled in the apostolic age (see 1:1 for association with James). Doing this after the apostolic age would be shooting down “straw men.”

D. The idea that they copied from one or the other is not certain. It is possible to consider their common verbiage as coming from an oral connection. The series of descriptions of false teachers could come from a common milieu of verbiage about such people.

VI. Literary Similarities Between 2 Peter and Jude (See also VIII A.)

A. Jude 17, 18 and 2 Peter 2:4

B. 2 Peter 2:11 and Jude 9

VII. That 2 Peter's Salutation Was Not Later Prefixed to the Beginning of an Older Writing

A. The way the salutation grammatically and conceptually connects with the body of the letter

1. The picture of Jude 12 is more authentic than 2 Peter 2:17.
2. The literary saying of 2 Peter 2:12 becomes understandable only after the concrete example of Jude 9.

B. The conceptual world and rhetorical language of 2 Peter are too strongly influenced by Hellenism.

C. Combats a second-century Gnosticism

D. From a time after collection of Paul's epistles and a time where exposition of scripture is reserved for ecclesiastical officials

E. Strong emphasis on Petrine composition

F. Not mentioned among second-century Christian writers

G. Greek style is quite different from 1 Peter.

H. Not cited as by Peter by early Christian writers

Summary

The main reasons for rejecting the epistle as Peter's are (1) significant style difference from 1 Peter, and (2) relatively limited use it by the early Christian community (It was disputed by the early church itself; it was not cited before Origen in A.D. 225.), and (3) it supposedly combats second-century Gnosticism. The style question cuts two ways regarding authorship: (a) If it is different, is it too different to be the same author? (b) If it is different, why would a forger not make a better effort at copying the author's real style?

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