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2 Peter

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2 Peter

A. Overview and Summary.

1. This is the second of two epistles written by the Apostle Peter. Tradition states that Peter was martyred during the persecution by Emperor Nero, who died in 68 AD. It is generally believed that Peter wrote this epistle shortly before his own death. Acceptance into the canon of Scripture was slow among the church fathers. This was primarily due to differences in vocabulary and style between the two books. The issue was resolved by a realization that Peter used a different amanuensis, or scribe for each book.
2. While Peter wrote the first epistle to encourage primarily Jewish believers facing persecution, this book was written to warn believers about false teaching creeping into the church. This epistle is considered the most scathing attack against false teachers in the New Testament, along with Jude. He describes false teachers and how their lack of moral fortitude can identify them. He also wanted, in a related theme, to encourage his readers to develop Christian character. Another significant theme is the acquisition of knowledge. Peter uses this term 16 times in these three chapters. Having true knowledge is Peter's solution to false teaching.

B. Chapter One.

1. After his greeting, Peter opens the epistle with a word about knowledge of God and Jesus and our great and precious promises: "Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (1:2-4). That we are "partakers of the divine nature" is indeed a great and precious promise. This is a unique attribute of New Covenant believers.
2. He again mentions knowledge as well as his theme of godliness of the believer: "But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love" (1:5-7).

3. Peter mentions his impending death which he believes will come soon and mentions Jesus foretold him of it: “knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. Moreover, I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease” (1:14-15).
4. He tells his readers what they have received from the apostles, came by being eyewitnesses and by direct revelation from God: “For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’ And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain” (1:16-18). The holy mountain refers to the Mount of transfiguration where Peter, James, and John were eyewitnesses.
5. Peter closes the first chapter with these words: “And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (1:19-21). That no prophecy came by private interpretation and it came by men moved by the Holy Spirit should be a strong word to those who claim falsely that God spoke this or that to them.

C. Chapter Two.

1. In chapter two, Peter gets to the point of his writing: “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time, their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber” (2:1-3).
2. He continues with a reminder of the destruction of angels who sinned, the wrath that fell upon Noah’s generation, Sodom and Gomorrah and then says: “the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries,

whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord” (2:9-11).

3. He continues with a strong word against the false teachers: “But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. They are spots and blemishes, arousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you, having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children. They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness” (2:12-15). The phrase “feast with you” most likely refers to the love feast or Lord’s Table. Peter is warning about these false teachers being embedded in their church meetings “with eyes full of adultery that cannot cease from sin.”
4. Peter closes the chapter with words that can be misunderstood: “For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of [corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: “A dog returns to his own vomit,” and, “a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire” (2:18-22). New converts to Christ can be drawn back into a life of sin. This is not to lose one’s salvation. It is the responsibility of the church to disciple such believers and help them mature to resist the influences of false teachers.

D. Chapter Three.

1. Peter opens the final chapter with a word about the Lord’s coming: “knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.’ For this they

willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (3:3-7). This cynicism is a common theme among today’s false teachers. They hope to destroy the hope that we have in looking to the return of Christ.

2. He reminds us God does not operate on our timeline: “But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (3:8-9).
3. He continues with an admonition to look to the Lord’s return: “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God” (3:10-12a).
4. Peter encourages us to be steadfast and he also mentions the writings of Paul which can be hard to understand: “Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures” (3:14-16). By saying this, Peter confirms that Paul’s writings are inspired.
5. He closes his epistle with these words: “You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen” (3:17-18).

E. Discussion Questions, Application and Passing it on.

1. Do you have a sense you are truly “partaking of the divine nature”? Does this concept help you to escape the corruption which is in the world?

2. Second Peter is a strong word against false teachers. However, unlike Paul's writings, he does not identify specific false teaching. Can you identify false teachings which are gaining footholds in today's churches? How would you address something false you see in your church?
3. In first Peter, he writes to his readers expressing their need for the pure milk of the word. But to confront false teaching, we need knowledge which Peter frequently refers to in second Peter. Are you gaining true knowledge which is "meat" in Scripture?
4. Does the phrase "one day is like a thousand years" cause you to have encouragement or the opposite as we wait for Christ's return?

This New Testament survey was provided by Joshua Nations (JoshuaNations.org)