

2 Peter 1:12-21

Lesson 2

This section gives the reason for Peter writing the letter and it indicates that he intends to leave them a testament. The testament is a genre of literature that exhibits certain traits and characteristics. It was a very common form of literary convention used from the 2nd century B.C. onward. There are at least two conventions of the testament genre that appear in this section: (1) the hero know that his death is approaching (vs. 14); (2) he has a desire for his teaching to be remembered after his death.¹

Typical features of the genre of the testament are:

1. The speaker knows that their death is near and there are indications that this knowledge comes through some sort of prophetic knowledge.
2. The speaker then gathers either his children or some sort of similar audience around himself in order to allow them to hear the message.

¹ Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, in the Word Biblical Commentary Series, vol. 50 (Waco TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1983), p. 194.

3. The speaker very often seeks to impress upon his audience the need for his audience to remember his teaching especially after they are gone.

4. The speaker will then make predictions about the future.

5. The speaker provides moral exhortations to his audience.

While it should be noted that testaments do not always follow this pattern exactly they do demonstrate these features in some manner and certainly this applies to Second Peter.² This epistle does contain those literary elements.

This section follows a short homily, then the real heart and heat of this letter quickly begins to develop and the intensity of the letter quickly builds as apology turns to polemic and polemic becomes attack. There are two primary themes that run through verses 12-15. The first of these themes and likely the more important of the two is the

² David R. Helm, *1 & 2 Peter and Jude - Sharing Christ's Sufferings*, in the Preaching the Word series (Wheaton IL: Crossway Books, 2008), p. 204.

role of memory. The second and the more dramatic of these is Peter's death. Peter's testament is linked to the previous section by his usage of the phrase "these things."³

**12 Διὸ μελλήσω ἀεὶ ὑμᾶς ὑπομιμνήσκειν περὶ τούτων
καίπερ εἰδότας καὶ ἐστηριγμένους ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ
ἀληθείας.**

**12 Therefore I intend to keep on reminding
you of these things, though you know them
already and are established in the truth that
has come to you.**

The usage of the term "therefore" (Διὸ) here likely has the meaning of "because salvation (v 11) depends on following the teaching of vv 3-11 (=τούτων, "these things").⁴ The very peculiar future tense "**I intend to keep on reminding you ...**" is likely a claim that the letter itself will become an enduring reminder and encouragement from Peter to his readers

³ Richard B. Vinson, Richard F. Wilson, and Watson E. Mills, *1 & 2 Peter, Jude*, in the Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2010), p. 309.

⁴ Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 195.

though many have speculated on other possible meanings, this is the most probable.⁵

Though some have seen Peter's usage of the phrase "**though you know them already and are established in the truth**" as patronizing,⁶ he is using this terminology in a way that it was common that is seen in numerous Early Christian writings; in a metaphorical sense (Luke 22:32; Acts 18:3; Romans 16:25; 1 Thessalonians 3:2; 1 Peter 5:10 and 2 *Clement* 2:6). In this context it means that the readers are well-grounded in the Christian faith, that they have been instructed in it, are committed to it and they are not likely to be led astray easily from the Christian faith. Certainly this letter is written to those who were coming under, or potentially coming under, the influence of false teachers. They are described

⁵ Richard B. Vinson, Richard F. Wilson, and Watson E. Mills, *1 & 2 Peter, Jude*, p. 310.

⁶ Richard B. Vinson, Richard F. Wilson, and Watson E. Mills, *1 & 2 Peter, Jude*, p. 310.

at 2:14 as “unstable” all the while the whole letter is concerned that the readers do not “lose their stability.” This indicates that there is probably a very strong element of hopefulness in the description of them in this verse rather than an attempt at sarcasm.⁷ Peter praises them for their start, and encourages them to maintain that direction rather than following what is being taught by the false teachers.

13 δίκαιον δὲ ἡγοῦμαι, ἐφ’ ὅσον εἰμι ἐν τούτῳ τῷ

σκηνώματι, διεγείρειν ὑμᾶς ἐν ὑπομνήσει,

¹³ I think it right, as long as I am in this body,

to refresh your memory,

Verses 13 and 14 represent one sentence and will therefore be discussed together in this section. The term translated here as “body” is the Greek term **σκήνωμα** and was used at the time of the New Testament for the “body” but was also used interchangeably with **σκήνος**

⁷ Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 197.

(tent) (Wisdom 9:15; 1 Corinthians 5:1, 5).⁸

The concepts of death and memory collide in verses 13 and 14 with memory becoming squeezed on either side of death. Knowing that death will come soon Peter thinks it right to remind them in a manner that refreshes their memory. The terms “body” (**σκήνωμα = tent**) and “death” (**ἀπόθεις**) are alternatives in some way to the concept of a “tent” and are used only here in the New Testament and at Acts 7:43, 46. This terminology recognizes that life is transitory. Peter is intent upon reminding his audience of the gospel (1:1-2), the power and promises of God (1:3-4), the need of growing faith that leads to a moral character (1:5-9), and the “call and election” (1:10). Peter now gets down to his intent for writing the letter and gets personal. In the time that he has left on this earth he wants to instill a lively and

⁸ Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 198.

vivid memory of his life and teachings into the minds of his readers for their protection and for the protection of those that will follow.⁹

14 εἰδὼς ὅτι ταχινή ἐστὶν ἡ ἀπόθελσις τοῦ σκηνώματός μου καθὼς καὶ ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς ἐδήλωσέν μοι,

14 since I know that my death will come soon, as indeed our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.

He claims that the source of his knowledge, of his pending death, is from no other source than from Jesus Christ Himself.

15 σπουδάσω δὲ καὶ ἐκάστοτε ἔχειν ὑμᾶς μετὰ τὴν ἐμὴν ἔξοδον τὴν τούτων μνήμην ποιεῖσθαι.

15 And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

Most readers understand this verse as

⁹ Richard B. Vinson, Richard F. Wilson, and Watson E. Mills, *1 & 2 Peter, Jude*, p. 311.

stating the ultimate purpose for writing this letter. The letter is to act as a permanent reminder of the things that Peter intends to articulate. The usage of the future tense here has proven to be both problematic and at times puzzling, as the grammar would suggest that Peter's eagerness goes beyond the writing of this letter. There have been a number of suggestions as to what this might refer to in this context with some thinking he may be referring to putting in written form the Petrine traditions such as is done in the Gospel of Mark or that he intends writing another letter. It is unlikely though that this is what it is being referred to here as he highlights once again "these things" and it is hard to imagine that this phrase could be a reference to the Gospel of Mark or some other as yet, unknown letter.¹⁰

¹⁰ Lewis R. Donelson, *I & II Peter and Jude A Commentary*, in *The New Testament Library commentary series* (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p. 227.

The future eagerness of Peter concerns this letter and their memory of it on into the future. It is likely that Peter here is anticipating that this work will take on authoritative status in the early church that will insure its survival and usage by the church as of course it has.¹¹

16 Οὐ γὰρ σεσοφισμένοις μύθοις ἐξακολουθήσαντες ἐγνωρίσαμεν ὑμῖν τὴν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ δύναμιν καὶ παρουσίαν ἀλλ' ἐπόπται γενηθέντες τῆς ἐκείνου μεγαλειότητος.

16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty.

In this short verse Peter rejects a mythic foundation for Christian Eschatology and claims to have been an eyewitness of what we will come to realize is the transfiguration. Implicit

¹¹ Lewis R. Donelson, *I & II Peter and Jude A Commentary*, pp. 227-228.

in this verse is the charge leveled against Peter by his opponents; that he resorted to cleverly designed myths. Peter flatly rejects their charge relying upon his claim that “**we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty.**” Verse 17 will demonstrate the source of authority; it was not given by men or by some cleverly concocted story, but came from God when the voice proclaimed to them the message on the mount of transfiguration and through being an eyewitness of the life of Jesus during his ministry.¹²

The Epicureans taught that the Greek stories of punishment in the afterlife were invented in order to be used as instruments of moral control. It seems possible that the opponents of Peter here may have said something similar and Second Peter is a response to these

¹² Richard B. Vinson, Richard F. Wilson, and Watson E. Mills, *1 & 2 Peter, Jude*, p. 313-314.

accusations.¹³ Josephus, in *Jewish Antiquities* 1.20 ff. refers to this ideology and disassociates particularly Moses and the Jewish law from such accusations. Instead he states that the grounds for law and morality are based in the nature of God and not upon some concocted mythology.¹⁴

Peter is going to make the case that Christianity has always been and must continue to be based in fact and not upon some of mythological make believe devised by those that he will clearly and powerfully condemn.

17 λαβὼν γὰρ παρὰ θεοῦ πατρὸς τιμὴν καὶ
δόξαν φωνῆς ἐνεχθείσης αὐτῷ τοιαῦδε ὑπὸ
τῆς μεγαλοπρεποῦς δόξης, Ὁ υἱός μου ὁ
ἀγαπητός μου οὗτός ἐστιν εἰς ὃν ἐγὼ
εὐδόκησα,

17 For he received honor and glory from God

¹³ Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 214.

¹⁴ H. St. J. Thackeray, *Josephus Jewish Antiquities Books I-III*, in the Loeb Classical Library series (Cambridge MA: 1998), pp. 10-13.

the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

Jesus receives “... honor and glory from God the Father...” and this stands in stark contrast to ideologies that were very much present in the Hellenistic world and would later come to have tremendous influence in the Christian world (i.e. gnosticism). The source of the “honor and glory” is the Father and it does not come at the Transfiguration from some hidden innate divinity, it is given to Jesus by the Father. Jesus is given divine glory because he is appointed to the task of executing God’s salvation and His judgment.¹⁵

A comparison between the Transfiguration account here in Second Peter with the Synoptic

¹⁵ Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude*, In the Tyndale New Testament Commentaries series, Revised ed. (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1987), p. 94.

accounts of the Transfiguration will highlight significant differences. This could be an indication of a much earlier date for the composition of Second Peter than is often suggested. If Second Peter was written sometime in the second century A.D. why would the author not have used the very familiar Transfiguration accounts of the Synoptics? These differences make perfect sense if they are from an eyewitness of the events i.e. Peter.¹⁶

**18 καὶ ταύτην τὴν φωνὴν ἡμεῖς ἠκούσαμεν
ἐξ οὐρανοῦ ἐνεχθεῖσαν σὺν αὐτῷ ὄντες ἐν
τῷ ἁγίῳ ὄρει.**

**18 We ourselves heard this voice come from
heaven, while we were with him on the holy
mountain.**

Here Peter puts forward himself as an expert witness so to speak on the witness stand, he was present when this happened and now he

¹⁶ Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude*, p. 94.

is recounting what he saw and heard as this expert witness. It is of note that Peter refers to this mountain as holy, which is not information that is conveyed in the Gospel accounts, but again might seem a natural statement coming from one who was an eyewitness. These two verses contain instances of the “language of honor.” This type of language reflects aspects of the culture into which Early Christianity made its advent. Peter here is defending his honor against attacks that are against him and therefore depreciate the message that he has delivered regarding the Gospel message. Peter had a special relationship with the events of the Gospel account, not only as an eyewitness but as a close companion and confidant of Jesus Himself. All of this information is given in order to indicate why his audience should listen to his words.¹⁷

¹⁷ Jerome H. Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude A New Translation with Introduction*

19 καὶ ἔχομεν βεβαιότερον τὸν προφητικὸν
λόγον, ᾧ καλῶς ποιεῖτε προσέχοντες ὡς
λύχνῳ φαίνοντι ἐν ἀύχμηρῳ τόπῳ, ἕως οὔ
ἡμέρα διαυγάσῃ καὶ φωσφόρος ἀνατείλῃ ἐν
ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν,

**19 So we have the prophetic message more
fully confirmed (alternative translation - we
place a very firm reliance upon the
prophetic word)¹⁸. You will do well to be
attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a
dark place, until the day dawns and the
morning star rises in your hearts.**

Many times this verse has been used in support of the authority of Scripture. This would not have been an issue for Peter as it would later be for the church with the rise in prominence of Marcion and others who would seek to challenge scripture. Peter is here

and Commentary, in *The Anchor Bible series*, Vol. 37C (New Haven CN: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 169-175.

¹⁸ Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 223.

defending something else; he is defending the integrity of “prophecy” itself, Old Testament prophecy, and more specifically a proper interpretation of prophecy and this defense will begin here and go into 2:3.¹⁹

**20 τοῦτο πρῶτον γινώσκοντες ὅτι πᾶσα
προφητεία γραφῆς ἰδίας ἐπιλύσεως οὐ
γίνεται·**

**²⁰ First of all you must understand this, that
no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's
own interpretation,**

Here Peter answers an additional objection made by those who oppose him. The opponents reject the authority of the Old Testament prophecy, especially in regard to the return of Christ, by denying its divine origin. They do not deny that the prophets received dreams and visions, the opponents of Peter

¹⁹ Richard B. Vinson, Richard F. Wilson, and Watson E. Mills, *1 & 2 Peter, Jude*, p. 318.

indicate that the prophet's interpretation was not divine, but came from the prophet himself and that the interpretation is not divine in origin. This then is a charge that the prophecies of the Old Testament were merely products of the human mind, the accusation is in the same way the apostolic message is also a human invention.²⁰

In reply to this charge the author flatly and categorically denies this and reasserts in the standard way used by Hellenistic Jewish writers, the divine origin of Old Testament prophecy. He denies that any Old Testament prophecy is the product of the human mind and instead reasserts the view that the origin, not only of the prophecy, but also its interpretation is from God. The view here is that the Holy Spirit of God inspired not only the dreams and visions of the prophets, but also their

²⁰ Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 235.

interpretations so that when they spoke they spoke the words of God.²¹

**21 οὐ γὰρ θελήματι ἀνθρώπου ἠνέχθη
προφητεία ποτέ, ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ πνεύματος ἁγίου
φερόμενοι ἐλάλησαν ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἄνθρωποι.** ²²

²¹ because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.²³

Synopsis

In this section Peter sets up for what is to follow by telling them that his purpose is to remind them of the things that are established in the truth and to refresh their memory. He does this using familiar literary techniques that they would have understood and appreciated as representing authority. He uses the form of the “testament” which has a long history and serves Peter’s purpose well of

²¹ Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 235.

²² Aland, K., Black, M., Martini, C. M., Metzger, B. M., Robinson, M., & Wikgren, A. (1993; 2006). *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition (with Morphology)* (2 Pe 1:12–21). Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.

²³ *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (2 Pe 1:12–2:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

reminding his audience of very important things in a very memorable manner. He indicates that he has special knowledge that comes from Jesus Christ with the implication that this should accord special attention to what is said. The testament works on the assumption that great men are granted special prophetic insight as they near the time of their death.

Peter addresses the accusations of his opponents who appear to have been making the accusation that not only were the Old Testament scriptures the cleverly devised myths of men so was the gospel. These accusations are totally repudiated and Peter makes it clear that as an eyewitness of the events surround the gospel and especially of the transfiguration he is in a position to know the truth. The source of both the gospel and the Old Testament prophecies is from God Himself and therefore it is the truth and is to be relied upon because of this divine source.

This will represent the opening salvo in what will be a concerted attack by Peter upon the false teachers who were

attempting to lead astray these faithful followers of the gospel.

Main Points

1. The purpose of the letter is given in the form of a testament and it is to remind them of the truth that was given to them and now in endangered.
2. Peter is an eyewitness of the giving of glory to Jesus at the transfiguration.
3. The gospel is factual and has as its source God and not the fantasies of human beings in the same way that the Old Testament Prophecies came from God.