

The Book of 2 Peter Study Guide

Chapter 1

In light of Peter's personal experience and the widespread persecution at the time his second letter was written, you might think that the theme would continue to be on suffering, as it was in the first letter. But that is largely not the case.

In his final days, Peter's pastoral priority shifted from helping believers endure physical pain to protecting them from spiritual ruin. To an apostle with an unshakable faith facing execution, physical martyrdom was a temporary trial, but heresy was an eternal threat. So, if Christians died under Roman persecution, they died as martyrs with an eternal inheritance. But if they were led astray by false teachers into denying Yeshua, they risked spiritual destruction. This letter makes it clear that an internal cancer had arisen that required an immediate, focused response that left no room to discuss the external Roman threat.

Moreover, in ancient literature, a "farewell discourse" (like Jacob's blessings in Genesis or Paul's speech to the Ephesian elders) rarely focuses on immediate political events. Instead, it focuses on the long-term legacy, truth, and doctrinal stability of the community after the leader passes away.

1:1-9

v 1 Nearly all English translations begin with the name Simon Peter (exception: CJB "*Shim'on Kefa*"). The actual Greek here for the first word is *Sumeon*, which is derived from the Hebrew *Shim'on* (*Shimeon*). That comes into English as Simeon, which is the name of one of Jacob's sons and the tribe that arose from him. Normally the New Testament refers to Peter with a Hellenized Greek form – *Simon*.

There are only two places where he is referred to using the unhellenized Greek form *Sumeon*, equivalent to the Hebrew Shimeon. One is in Acts 15:14. That was in the context of the Jerusalem Council when the leaders were debating whether Gentile converts must follow the Law of Moses in order to be saved. Those leaders were a conservative, Jerusalem-based assembly of Judean Jews. James, the senior leader of the council, spoke up and said:

"Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name."

By using the name Simeon, James acknowledged Peter's identity as a traditional, Hebrew-speaking Galilean Jew rather than an assimilated Hellenistic Jew. This reinforced Peter's authority among a faction that was deeply concerned with the preservation of Mosaic traditions.

The second use of the name Simeon is here in 2 Peter 1:1, although the translators apparently defaulted to the name Simon. In so doing, they broke the link to Acts 15:14. Peter intentionally referred to himself with the more Hebraic form as a way of validating his Jewish Identity. At the same time, he added his Greek apostolic name, *Petros*, as a way of validating his authority to the non-Jews of his audience. This duality beautifully mirrors the overarching mission of The Way—a movement born completely within the Jewish context, but now successfully expanding to encompass the entire Greek-speaking Gentile world.

So, Peter calls the believers of his audience people who have received a faith of equal

standing and value to that of the apostles, because all have received the same righteousness through Yeshua.

- v 2-3 He confirms the deity of Yeshua by referring to His divine power in verse 3 (the antecedent in verse 2 is “Yeshua our Lord”). And, because of that, He has granted believers “everything pertaining to life and godliness.” In other words, we don’t have to seek anything else for a meaningful life than what we already have.
- v 4 This provision of power is secured by “precious and magnificent/very great promises” that allow believers to share in the divine nature and escape the moral corruption of the world. He does not specify what those promises are here, but later in chapter 3, he refers to the promise of Messiah’s return and the promise of a new heaven and a new earth. To those, the greater context of Scripture adds the promises of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the absolute forgiveness of sins, and an eternal inheritance, among others.
- v 5-7 Because God has provided this foundation, believers are commanded to “apply all diligence” in order to grow in spiritual maturity. Peter lists seven interconnected character traits that must be added to a person’s initial faith, with each virtue building upon the last:
- **Virtue** (Moral excellence)
 - **Knowledge** (Spiritual understanding)
 - **Self-control** (Mastery over desires)
 - **Steadfastness** (Patient endurance)
 - **Godliness** (Reverence toward God)
 - **Brotherly affection** (Kindness to fellow believers)
 - **Love** (Selfless, sacrificial love for all)
- v 8-9 Peter states that if these qualities are increasing in a believer’s life, they keep that person from being ineffective, useless, or unfruitful in their knowledge of Yeshua. Conversely, anyone who lacks these qualities is described as spiritually blind and short-sighted. Such a person has forgotten that they were cleansed from their past sins, losing sight of the very starting point of their faith.

1:10-15

- v 10-11 Because of the virtues listed previously, Peter commands believers to be “all the more diligent” to confirm their calling and election by God. He promises that if they actively practice these qualities, they will never fall away or lose their footing. And, by doing so, they will be granted a grand, “richly provided” entrance into the eternal kingdom of Messiah Yeshua.
- v 12 Peter acknowledges that his readers already know these truths and are firmly established in them.
- v 13-14 But, despite their knowledge, he insists that it is his right and duty, as long as he is alive (“in this body” or “tent”), to continually refresh their memories and keep them

spiritually alert. Peter explicitly states that he knows the departure from his physical body was imminent, a reality that Yeshua had personally revealed to him. That is a reference to John 21:18-19, where Yeshua, after His resurrection, told Peter on the shore of the Sea of Galilee:

¹⁸ “Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go.”

¹⁹ Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He *said to him, “Follow Me!”

The context here is important. These words come after Peter’s denial of Yeshua before his crucifixion. But now, Yeshua is restoring Peter for a great calling of bringing the Gospel to the nations and to his fellow Jewish people. The details of Jesus’ words carry precise meanings:

“Stretch out your hands” – In the ancient Greco-Roman world, this exact Greek phrasing was a well-known idiom specifically used to describe crucifixion, referring to a victim’s arms being forced outward onto the crossbeam.

“Someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go” – This refers to being bound, tied, or secured by executioners.

“When you grow old” – Yeshua guaranteed Peter that he would not face immediate execution during the volatile early days of his ministry. He would live to an advanced age before martyrdom took place.

So, when Peter wrote this epistle, he had been living under the weight of this specific prediction for roughly three decades. And now as an old man living under the hostile reign of Emperor Nero, Peter realizes that the condition of the prophecy—growing old—has been met. Because he knows Yeshua’s words are absolute truth, he recognizes that his execution is at hand, prompting him to urgently record his final testimonies before he is forced to “lay aside” his “earthly dwelling” (KJV “tabernacle”).

- v 15 His primary goal in writing this letter is to make “every effort” to leave behind a permanent written record. This ensures that after his death, his readers will be able to recall these crucial spiritual principles at any time. Having this understanding should lead us all to ask what kind of legacy will we leave behind that truly makes a difference in this world or even in the lives of a few, like our family or a congregation.

Peter now directly connects his impending death to his absolute certainty about the gospel.

1:16-21

- v 16-18 Knowing that his time is short, he defends the truth of his message by pivoting from Yeshua’s prophecy about his future to a profound, firsthand experience from his past—the Transfiguration of Yeshua (Matthew 17:1–8, Mark 9:2–8, Luke 9:28–36). Peter uses this specific event to establish his authority and dismantle the arguments of false teachers through three key arguments:

1. Factual Eyewitness History vs. “Cleverly Devised Myths”

The false teachers in those days were arguing that the promised Second Coming of Messiah (the *Parousia*) was a symbolic tale or an invented allegory. Peter fiercely rejects this, using the Greek word *epoptai* (“eyewitnesses”). This was a term used in ancient Greco-Roman mysteries for those who had reached the highest level of initiation and had seen the secrets with their own eyes. Peter is stating that the glory of Yeshua is not a philosophical speculation or a “clever myth”—it is a hard, historical fact observed by living men.

2. The Transfiguration as a Preview of the Second Coming

Peter chooses the Transfiguration because it was a literal, visual preview of Yeshua’s future kingly power. On that mountain, Peter, James, and John saw Yeshua’s clothes flash white and His face shine like the sun. Peter’s logic is simple: Because I have already seen Jesus clothed in His future, heavenly majesty once, I know for a certainty that He will return in that same power.

3. The Validation of the Father’s Voice

Peter anchors his testimony not just in what he saw, but in what he heard. He quotes the exact words spoken by God the Father out of the cloud: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” By highlighting this, Peter reminds his readers that Jesus didn’t just claim authority; God the Father explicitly bestowed “honor and glory” upon Him.

The phrase “we ourselves heard this very voice” emphasizes that this wasn’t an internal, subjective feeling or a private dream. It was an objective, audible reality shared by three separate witnesses, thus fulfilling the biblical requirement that “every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses” (Deuteronomy 19:15).

So, by weaving his impending martyrdom together with his memories of the “holy mountain,” Peter leaves his readers with an unshakeable conclusion: a man does not willingly face crucifixion for a cleverly devised myth. And that is what makes his epistle still relevant to the issue of suffering, even if he doesn’t use the word directly.

- v 19 Having just established his impeccable credentials as an auditory and visual eyewitness of Yeshua’s glory, his experience on the Transfiguration mountain did not just validate the message of the Old Testament prophets; the written words of the prophets are even “more sure” than his own spiritual experience on the mountain. By saying that, Peter is protecting his readers from subjective mysticism. While they cannot climb the mountain with Peter or hear the audible voice of God themselves, they do possess the written scriptures, which are an even more stable, objective, and permanent anchor for faith than another person’s subjective experience.

He also affirms Scripture as being a “lamp shining in a dark place”—using a Greek word (*auchmērō*) that denotes a filthy, squalid, or murky room. In this dark age, scripture acts as a literal lamp (*lychnō*) guiding the believer’s steps until the “day dawns and the morning star rises,” which is a direct reference to the Second Coming of Messiah (the ultimate morning star, as in Numbers 24:17 and Revelation 22:16).

- v 20 To prove why Scripture is so completely reliable, Peter dismantles the idea that the Bible is a collection of human opinions or clever fabrications. Based on the Greek text and the

immediate context, when Peter is describing the origin and production of scripture, not the rules for reading and understanding it. He is asserting that ancient prophets did not look at the world around them and form their own personal opinions or interpretations of history, and then write down those human thoughts as scripture.

- v 21 Instead arising from their own will, the message of the prophets resulted from the moving of the Holy Spirit. He uses a powerful Greek word (*pheromenoi*) that describes a sailing ship being driven across the water by the wind. That depicts human writers raising their sails, and the Holy Spirit moving, filling, and guiding them to write exactly what God intended, while still preserving their unique human personalities and voices.

By concluding Chapter 1 this way, Peter successfully transitions his readers away from relying on his eyewitness testimony (which would soon end with his death) to relying on the permanent, divinely inspired, and unshakeable Word of God.