

Supporting Notes & Questions

Read the New Testament in a Year

Dr Jean Ware

1 Peter 1-5 and 2 Peter 1-3

Theologians disagree about whether the two New Testament Letters which bear Peter's name were written by Peter himself, or by a church leader of the next generation. The weight of the evidence in relation to 1 Peter seems to be in favour of a next generation leader, who as an admirer of Peter, uses the apostle's name to add weight to what he is saying. Although we would regard this as a questionable practice today, it was both accepted and common in the ancient world, and indicates the importance of Peter in the early Church. The letter was most probably written from Rome to Gentile Christians scattered across the area of what today is Turkey. In it the author seeks to encourage and strengthen Christians who are experiencing hostility and persecution because of their faith in Jesus. Even when they did not (yet) experience persecution by the state, they were regarded with suspicion by their neighbours because they rejected commonly accepted social norms regarding social and religious life. So, in this letter the author reminds the Christians in these scattered churches that they are the people of God, and assures them that their hope of salvation through Jesus is well-founded.

Chapter 1 vv 1-12

Like a number of the New Testament letters, 1 Peter starts with a conventional greeting, but expanded to give a deeper meaning, so when the author refers to the Christians to whom he writes as 'living as aliens' he is not just thinking of where they live geographically, but of their position as citizens of heaven, living for the time being on earth. Verses 3 -5 both praise God for the new birth by which Christians enter the inheritance which they have been promised and for which they hope, and stress that although the readers are suffering now, yet their inheritance is secure. In verses 10-12 the author states his belief that the prophets who looked forward to the time of God's salvation, were inspired to look forward to the coming of Jesus.

Verses 13-25 In these verses, the author moves on to urge his readers to live holy lives, in response to what God has done for them in Christ. A holy life, the author explains, is one which is pure and lived in imitation of God's own holiness; and, he notes the consequence of this will be sincere and wholehearted love of their fellow Christians

Questions: Is it still a problem for us, as it was for the readers of 1 Peter, that the final revelation of God's new world seems to be long delayed?

How wholehearted is our love of our fellow Christians?

Chapter 2

The first 10 verses of 1 Peter 2 are full of images and phrases which may well be familiar to many of us, culminating in the statement that the Christian community is a royal priesthood. Perhaps the important point to note here is that like all the images in this section, this is an image applied to the community as a whole, rather than to individuals. The Christian community to whom 1 Peter is written are reminded that their call is to worship and to witness through holy living.

The next section of Chapter 2 contains detailed instructions as to how this is to be translated into daily life, within the society in which they find themselves. 1 Peter, like other New Testament letters, suggests that the way for Christians to combat the suspicion and harassment they face is by being model citizens. Some of this section, with its apparently unquestioning acceptance of a society which was very unequal make difficult reading for us.

Question How far does this apply directly in the society in which we live? Or does the call to live holy lives have a different working out in 21st century Wales?

Supporting Notes & Questions

Chapter 3

The first seven verses of 1 Peter³ have caused no end of trouble. But read with care, they represent a radical reappraisal of the roles of men and women; Christian women and men 'share God's gift of life'. Tom Wright suggests that there is no room here for a stereotypical division of roles between men and women, but rather for mutual respect and support. The chapter continues with practical, but hard to follow, advice on the implications of Christ's suffering and death for how Christians are to respond to being maligned or abused. We should always be ready to give an account of why we have placed our hope in Christ, but to do so in a way which doesn't get people's backs up. Finally the author draws a parallel between the crossing of the Red Sea in the Exodus, and baptism.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 first challenges Christians to use their time and gifts well, for each other's benefit and building up the community. Then the issue of suffering because they are Christians is raised again. But charging people with being Christians says 1 Peter is a two-edged sword, because it highlights the name of Christ and the faith and conviction of the person who sticks with their faith despite the suffering. Finally there's a reminder that we all need God's grace, every single one of us needs the salvation offered in Christ.

Chapter 5

The final chapter of 1 Peter turns its attention to those who are leaders in the congregations. They are reminded that they are to be humble shepherds, not seeking advantage for themselves but caring for others and leading by example. But there is also a warning for everyone that they need to stand firm despite the very real presence of evil which may shake their faith. They are reminded that other Christians face similar troubles.

2 Peter

Chapter 1

This starts with the big picture God has given us everything we need to enable us to grow and develop so that we share more and more of God's nature, and it shows in our lives. We are to shun 'lust' because lust of all kinds makes us less and less human- A bit like what happens to Gollum in the Hobbit. Instead we are to practice the gifts which God gives us freely, deepening our faith through knowledge, learning self-control and patience, and above all to love one another.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 is mainly concerned with false teachers whom Christians need to be on their guard. Telling false from true teaching is often not easy. 2 Peter however does give us a few clues as to how to tell true and false teaching apart. For a start, false teachers may suggest that Jesus is one teacher amongst a number, and deny that his sacrifice on the cross was the only means for God to reconcile the world to himself. They may encourage practices which are out of line with the gospel. And false teachers may be looking for personal gain of some sort from their teaching.

Chapter 3

2 Peter concludes by emphasising that, though we cannot know when the Day of the Lord will be, we can rely on God's promise that there will be a (re)newed heaven and earth. It is a constant theme of this letter that we need to respond to this by working to bring it about- not because the day of its fulfilment is in our hands but because in every step towards a more just, equal and peaceful world, a little glimpse of the kingdom is revealed.

Question: 2 Peter mentions growing in knowledge several times. How can we grow in knowledge of the sort of lives which should result from being disciples of Christ?

Read the New Testament in a Year

Supporting Notes & Questions