

5-1985

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Recommended Citation

Willmington, Harold, "Peter's Two Epistles" (1985). *Articles*. 33.

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Peter's Two Epistles

by Harold L. Willmington

Of the original 12 apostles, only Matthew, John, and Peter were chosen to write inspired New Testament books or epistles. Peter has been called "the apostle of hope" (see 1 Peter 1:3,13,21; 3:15), and his name appears 210 times in the New Testament.

A key word in this epistle is "suffering." It, or its equivalent, is used 16 times. Peter speaks of Christ's suffering 6 times and of the suffering of believers 10 times. Another important word is "grace," which appears 8 times.

The letter was probably written at the end of Peter's life, around A.D. 64, on the eve of the outbreak of the persecution by Nero, who died in A.D. 68. Some think that after writing this epistle, Peter was arrested and tried. He wrote 2 Peter between his trial and execution (2 Peter 1:13-21).

Because of its many passages on suffering (1:6-7; 4:12-19; 5:10), this epistle can be looked upon as the Job of the New Testament. The book is in reality a fulfillment of the commission given to Peter by Christ in Luke 22:31-32 and John 21:15-17. Chapter 3 can be considered the marriage chapter (vv. 1-12) because of the advice Peter gives to husbands and wives.

In a remarkable passage (3:18-22), Peter explains the activities of Christ during the time between His death and Resurrection. In 1 Peter we are given the final of three descriptive phrases concerning the shepherding ministry of Christ: He is described as the Good Shepherd in John 10:11; the Great Shepherd in Hebrews 13:20; and Peter calls Him the Chief Shepherd (5:4).

Peter also has much to say about the Word of God. He says it is incorruptible (1:23), eternal (1:25), and, to the believer, as wholesome milk (2:2). In his development of the doctrine of Christ he discusses His Incarnation (1:20), His sinless life (1:19; 2:22), His suffering and death (1:11; 2:23-24; 3:18; 4:1,13; 5:1), His Resurrection (3:21), His Ascension (3:22) and His Second Coming (1:13; 4:13; 5:1,4). Peter refers to Christ as a

spotless Lamb (1:19), the chief Cornerstone (2:6), the precious Stone (2:7), the stumbling Stone (2:8), the Bishop of our souls (2:25), and the Chief Shepherd (5:4).

Peter also offers a number of titles that describe believers, perhaps more than in any other New Testament book. We are referred to as obedient children (1:14), newborn babes (2:2), living stones (2:5), a royal priesthood (2:9), a holy nation (2:9), a peculiar people (2:9), strangers and pilgrims (2:11), Christians (4:16), the righteous (4:18), the elect of God (1:2), the people of God (2:10), the oracles of God (4:11), and the flock of God (5:2).

The Epistle of 1 Peter is the 14th longest New Testament book, and 45th longest biblical book, with five chapters, 105 verses, and 2,483 words. There are quotations or allusions from 15 Old Testament books in 1 Peter.

In 2 Peter we find Simon Peter's last words. This epistle contains the only interconnective reference from one apostolic epistle to another. In other words, Peter refers to Paul's writing (3:15-16). It is very similar to the Book of Jude, reiterating 19 of Jude's 25 verses in some fashion. Its theme, full knowledge, appears some 16 times with cognate words.


This letter may be favorably compared to 2 Timothy. Both books are the last written by their authors. Both contain a key passage on the subject of inspiration (2 Peter 1:20-21; 2 Tim. 3:16). Both warn against false teachers (2 Tim. 3 and 2 Peter 2). Both men knew they would die a martyr's death for Christ (2 Tim. 4:6; cf. 2 Peter 1:13-15).

Peter's second epistle is summarized in one verse. "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen" (3:18). Second Peter is the only biblical book that discusses God's sovereign dealings with the former, present, and future worlds. Peter reflects on the former world, destroyed by the great flood (3:4-6). He prophesies that the present world will be destroyed by a great fire (3:7-12), and that the

future world is to be created in righteousness (3:13-14).

The Epistle of 2 Peter is the 21st longest New Testament book, and 55th longest biblical book, with three chapters, 61 verses, and 1,559 words. There are quotations or allusions from six Old Testament books in 2 Peter.

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