SESSION OBJECTIVE: 2 PETER 1:1-2
To understand who wrote 2 Peter, and how grace and peace are multiplied to believers.

Who Doesn't Love a Sequel?

Sequels are exciting, aren't they? Whenever a great movie or book comes to its end, it leaves you with a sense of wanting more. In 1977, *Star Wars* blew people away in the theaters, and the saga in a galaxy far, far away was born. People wanted to see more, and they were met in 1980 with arguably the best film of the franchise, *The Empire Strikes Back*. The same could be said of so many books and/or movies. Sequels carry on the stories we so desperately want to continue.

The Bible contains sequels within itself, in a sense. 1 Peter, penned by the apostle Peter, is rich with theological treasure, and yet practical in so many ways as well. While it wraps up nicely, you can't help but want to hear more from Peter (and the Holy Spirit speaking and writing through him). And what follows 1 Peter in the New Testament? *2 Peter*. You have likely just finished studying 1 Peter, and what better place to land than the sequel? The journey continues…

The Author

Verse 1 begins by telling us, before anything else, who wrote this letter. "Simon Peter" (2 Pet. 1:1). Peter is featured in all three so-called *Synoptic Gospels* (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), as well as *The Gospel According to John*. He is also seen in the *Acts of the Apostles*, and mentioned in *Galatians* and *1 Corinthians* (by the name Cephas) by Paul. He is a central figure in the New Testament and one of Jesus' "inner three" disciples to witness Jesus' transfiguration (along with James and John).

BACKGROUND

Peter's original name was Simon, meaning "hearer." He was the son of a man named Jonas (Matt. 16:17; Jn. 1:42), and was raised in the tradition and skill of his father, a fisherman. Peter had one brother named Andrew, and both they and James and John, sons of Zebedee, were partners. Peter lived in a house that belonged either to himself or his mother-in-law in Capernaum, and it was likely a rather spacious home, as evidenced by the number of individuals who came to either stay with him and his family or to witness the miracles and preaching of Jesus. The evidence of a mother-in-law shows that Peter was also married. The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:5, "Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas?" While it isn't something mentioned often, it is an interesting aspect of Peter's life to take into account.

Peter, as well as Andrew, John, and James were all originally disciples of John the Baptist, and he was likely between the ages of 30 and 40 when he received his call to follow Jesus. Peter is often seen as rash and forward, and almost overly self-confident. He is usually the representative voice of the disciples when they have a question for Jesus, and in every list of the apostle in the New Testament, Peter is named first. Along with Paul, Peter is seen as one of the more instrumental and authoritative apostles, often traveling around to various churches to give instruction and correction.

Peter is responsible for at least two books in the New Testament (1 Peter and 2 Peter), but was likely instrumental in a third as well. The Gospel which we know today as Mark was historically referred to as the Memoirs of Peter. John Mark was a protege under Peter, and since Mark did not personally walk with Jesus during His earthly ministry, someone had to have relayed those details to him. Historical tradition, once again, indicates that it was Peter who recounted the Gospel's details, and mark penned them.

The time and manner of his death is not totally certain, but church tradition does give some account. According to the early fathers, he suffered death around the same time that Paul did under the Emperor Nero. Origen, an instrumental church father, wrote that Peter felt himself to be unworthy of death by crucifixion, the same manner of death as the Lord, and requested to be instead crucified upside down.

A Demonstration of Godly Leadership

Peter identifies himself as more than a mere disciple of Jesus: "a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:1). Apostolic authority was the highest human authority in the early church. The early church, "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). Apostles fulfilled the New Testament equivalence of an Old Testament prophet, as they were able to perform miracles on demand as signs from God, and they spoke on behalf of God such that to contradict or disobey an apostle was to disobey God Himself. This speaks to why Paul also appeals to His apostleship when giving commands to the church in Corinth: "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works" (2 Cor. 12:12). Peter identifies himself as an apostle in both of the letters attributed to him (1 Peter and 2 Peter).

Peter's title as an apostle carried serious weight, but he also counter-balanced it by referring to himself as a, "servant" (2 Pet. 1:1). The word used in the original language is δοῦλος (doulos), and it literally means *slave*. In other words, Peter held a position of extraordinary authority, but still recognized that he was subservient to the true King, Jesus Christ. Godly leadership demands this kind of understanding. God raises up leaders throughout every age, and charges them with a mission, but they are not to lead from their own strength or

wisdom, but from the wisdom of God. Philippians 2:5-8 says it best: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” This is the mindset that every Christian is called to, and one that Peter regularly demonstrated.

The Audience

In the first letter, Peter makes his intended audience very clear: “To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Pet. 1:1). Peter borrows from the exilic language of the Hebrew people in the Old Testament, pulled from their land and thrust into strange kingdoms that worship false gods, and applies it to Christians. 1 Peter is oriented towards Christians specifically who were facing a high level of persecution.

But who did Peter write *this* letter to? He tells us very clearly here as well: “To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:1). While the threat of persecution was high for Peter’s audience in his first letter, there is another threat on the horizon for Peter’s audience in 2 Peter: *false teaching*. Peter says in 2 Peter 2:1, “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.” This is one of the main themes of this letter. Below is a brief breakdown of some important phrases in this verse.

“While the threat of persecution was high for Peter’s audience in 1 Peter, there is another threat on the horizon for Peter’s audience in 2 Peter: *false teaching*."

A FAITH OF EQUAL STANDING

Peter describes his audience as those, “who have obtained a faith of equal standing.” It could be translated more literally as, “a faith as equally precious as ours.” In other words, his audience’s faith is no less-advantaged than his as an apostle. They are in equal standing in the eyes of the Lord. They are equally blessed with, “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Eph. 1:3).

OUR GOD AND SAVIOR

His reference to Jesus is powerful: “Our God and Savior Jesus Christ.” There are few other passages in the New Testament that so outwardly and explicitly demonstrate the deity of Christ. Jesus Christ is not merely a human Savior, but He is filled with the fullness of deity (Col. 2:9), and even the Creator of all things (Col. 1:16), bound in human flesh (Jn. 1:14). He is both *God* and *Savior*.

Grace and Peace

Peter finishes his greeting in verse 2: “May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” Both grace and peace are clear and unique markers of Christianity. Below is a brief outline of important phrases.

GRACE AND PEACE

Grace is the undeserved gift of God, namely salvation found in Christ. That salvation accomplishes a number of needs on our behalf. We are forgiven our transgressions against God (1 Jn. 1:9). We are purchased out of the bondage of sin and death by redemption (Eph. 1:7). We are imputed Christ’s righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21). We are reconciled back to Him in right standing (Rom. 5:10). All of this was accomplished by God and given

to us. He, "caused us to be born again, according to His great mercy" (1 Pet. 1:3). We were undeserving, and yet grace covers us. That gift of God is the only true way of knowing and experiencing peace. We are otherwise at war with and hostile towards God (Eph. 2:3). God's grace leads to God's peace, and all of it is received by faith (Eph. 2:8-9).

MULTIPLIED IN THE KNOWLEDGE

Though received by faith, Peter makes the case in this verse that grace and peace are *multiplied* to us through the knowledge of God and Jesus. In other words, as we grow in our knowledge of God, the grace and peace we experience in Him are multiplied to us. This fits with the theme of writing against false teachers and warning the church to stand firm in the truth of God's Word. Why? Because true knowledge of Him is the only means by which grace and peace are multiplied to you.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read 2 Peter 1:1. Who is the author of this letter? How do you know?

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2. Read 2 Peter 1:1. What two terms does Peter employ to describe himself? What is the significance of each of the terms and how they relate to one another?

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Day Two

1. Read 2 Peter 1:1. Who is the audience of this letter?

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2. Read 2 Peter 1:1. What is the significance of Peter's description of his audience? What does it mean?

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Day Three

1. According to the notes, what primary threat is facing Peter's audience?

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2. Read 2 Peter 1:1. How does Peter describe Jesus in verse 1? Why is this important?

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Day Four

1. Read 2 Peter 1:2. What is multiplied to you through the knowledge of God and Jesus?

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2. How does the emphasis of knowledge reinforce the main purpose for Peter writing this letter?

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Week 1 Discussion: The Knowledge of God

Understanding how God has revealed Himself is the most important thing you can learn. It sets us forth on the righteous path and allows us to walk in the blessing God has planned for us (Prov. 1:7). God desires that we know Him more than we sacrifice (Hos. 6:6). In fact, it is the lack of knowledge that led to the destruction of God's people in the Old Testament (Hos. 4:6). Knowledge of God is an indication of spiritual maturity (Eph. 4:13). In fact, we cannot please God without increasing in knowledge of Him (Col. 1:10). It is also, according to 2 Peter 1:2, the means by which grace and peace are multiplied to us. How do we, then, learn more of God? Through the study of His Word. Talk as a group about the value of Bible study, and how it has impacted you.

1. Icebreaker: How long have you been involved in a Bible study class?
2. What's the biggest impact that a Bible study class has had on you personally?
3. How often do you study your Bible throughout the week? Be honest, there is no shame.
4. What do you need to become more consistent with your independent study?
5. How did you first come to this class? Who invited you?
6. Have you ever invited anyone else to this class?

Takeaways:

1. Peter wrote 2 Peter to a group of Christians who were facing the threat of false teaching.
2. The knowledge of God is a fundamentally important aspect of Christian living.

PRAYER REQUESTS: