

THE LETTER OF II PETER

Sometime between the years 60 and 63, Peter writes a letter (our II Peter)⁷⁶ to Jewish Christians who for the most part, if not altogether, are in Palestine and adjoining regions (but not in the regions north and northwest of Antioch). This large group of churches owed their Christianity to the preaching of Peter and other men from among the twelve apostles and the personal disciples of Jesus. Where Peter was at the time of this writing is not known.

Peter's purpose in writing is to exhort his readers to a holy life in light of the prospect of the prophesied end of the world.⁷⁷ He also warns his readers of alleged teachers of Christianity who will come among them. These false teachers at one time knew the way of righteousness. However, they have since given it all up and have become worse than they were before their alleged conversion. They prefer to seduce those recently converted who were not yet firmly grounded in the Christian life, betraying them by their evil counsel and encouraging them into immorality. These teachers have an unbridled indulgence of the passions that they present as Christian freedoms lacking in the church. They combine this teaching with a contempt for prophecy. They have already been at work among Gentile Christians elsewhere, leading some astray. This is the second time that Peter has written them concerning these false teachers, the first letter not being extant.⁷⁸

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

In the year 62 the Apostle Matthew, who was also called Levi, was living in Palestine. During the time of Jesus' earthly ministry, Matthew had been a tax collector in Capernaum in the territory of Herod Antipas. Although not a Roman official, Matthew stood either directly in the service of the reigning prince or under the person who had the taxes of the city or a larger district in tenure. In addition to speaking the Aramaic dialect of the land, Matthew must have been able to use Greek also. Since he gave up his occupation in order to attach himself to Jesus, he must have been acquainted with him for a considerable period of time and significantly affected by his preaching, feeling the utmost confidence in him. He had celebrated this change in his life with a feast in his house, inviting Jesus together with a large number of people of like mind and belonging to his class in society.

While still in Palestine around the year 62, Matthew, using the vernacular Aramaic, wrote his Gospel for both non-Hellenized Jews⁷⁹ who were not yet Christians as well as for those

76 Zahn places the writing of II Peter earlier than the writing of I Peter (II:210). His main argument is that in II Peter, it is nowhere stated that he is in Rome. When Peter writes I Peter, he is almost certainly in Rome (see footnote 81). Many modern evangelical scholars would reverse this order and date II Peter shortly before his death, which Peter views as imminent in 1:14, and which occurred during the reign of Nero somewhere between 64 (Zahn's date for Peter's execution) and the death of Nero in 68.

77 This is Zahn's phrase referring to II Pet. 1:5-21 and 3:1-14 (II:196). Peter is describing the "eternal kingdom" (1:11) and the second advent (3:4).

78 II Pet. 3:1. Those who date the two Petrine letters in their canonical order often take this as a reference to I Peter.

79 *Hellas* is the Greek word for *Greece*. A Hellenized Jew was a one who lived outside of Palestine and used the Greek language and customs.

Christian Jews still open to Jewish influence.⁸⁰ Matthew's Gospel was eventually translated into Greek. By the year 100 at the latest, the Gentile Christian churches of Asia Minor, perhaps also of other regions, where once the Aramaic Matthew was orally translated into Greek with great effort, were in possession of a written Greek translation. This translation was considered in every sense a substitute for the original Aramaic work.

Matthew's Gospel was a historical apology of the Nazarene and His Church over against Judaism. Matthew's intent was to set forth the history of Jesus in such a way that He should be recognized from that history as the Messiah and as the fulfillment of the promise made to the house of David and the seed of Abraham. When he begins with the genealogy of Jesus, it is not for the purpose of proving the descent of Jesus from David and Abraham. Even Jesus' bitterest opponents never denied Joseph's Davidic descent. Rather he wishes to bring before his readers in the shortest possible form the whole history of Israel, from the founder of the race to the Messiah, in order to express the thought that the Jesus who received the title Messiah was the goal of the entire history of His people. In the genealogy, Matthew brings out dark blots in Israel's history, not for the purpose of casting reflections upon the ancestry of the Messiah, but in answer to the Jewish slander that Mary's pregnancy was the result of adultery. If these blots, Matthew argues, on the history of the Jewish people and on the royal house do not hinder the Jew from recognizing in that history a sacred account of divine revelation, then certainly the evil suspicion cast upon the birth of Jesus by malicious enmity should not prevent the Jew from investigating the facts of Jesus' life and from patiently hearing the exposition of those facts.

THE LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

About April of 63, Paul's two years of relative freedom end, thus curtailing his preaching activity. His formal trial begins.

Paul writes the Epistle to the Philippians in the summer of 63. He is still in prison in Rome, but his trial has taken a favorable turn resulting in great optimism that he will soon be released.

Some time prior to the writing of this letter, the Philippian church, which had been very faithful in sending gifts to Paul, had sent another gift by one of their own members, Epaphroditus. He had also been instructed by the church to stay in Rome and care for Paul's

⁸⁰ Questions relating to origin are considerably more difficult for the four Gospels than for the NT letters. A vast amount of scholarly literature exists on these issues and conclusions naturally vary. Much depends on literary arguments concerning which Gospels borrowed from which. This paper, of course, presents Zahn's conclusions, with an occasional note if modern evangelical scholarship differs on some major issue. With regard to Matthew, the following is noted. *Concerning date*: the modern liberal consensus is between A.D. 80 and 100, although evangelicals generally put the date before A.D. 70, in agreement with Zahn. *Concerning place of origin*: most modern scholars of every stripe opt for Syria, although no real issue hangs on this decision. *Concerning original language*: Papias seems to have claimed that Matthew was originally written in Aramaic. Some modern scholars have questioned the translation of this line from Papias, but later church Fathers without exception claimed that Matthew originally wrote in Aramaic. However, only a few modern scholars take this position. For a review of these issues, see D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992], pp. 66-79.

needs after delivering the gift. However, when Epaphroditus arrives where Paul is staying, he is taken dangerously ill. News is exchanged between Philippi and Rome by messengers. In all probability these men also carried letters. Paul sends a letter to the church at Philippi (not our Philippians) in which he acknowledges their gift and tells of Epaphroditus' arrival, subsequent illness, and his own state of affairs and impending trial. The church at Philippi responds with a letter expressing their own dissatisfaction with what they had done to support Paul and his work, apologizing for the smallness and tardiness of their latest gift. They also express concern for Paul's condition and trial, fearing not only for the apostle's life but also for the cause of the gospel. These anxieties, together with the added concern for Epaphroditus' life, had produced a feeling of utter depression in the church.

Paul then writes another letter (our Philippians) assuring them of his gratitude and full contentment and of how his state of affairs has actually served to advance the gospel. He is joyful that it has now become clear to everyone that he has been imprisoned solely because of his relation to Christ and not for any offense against public order. Even though his preaching has been temporarily set aside due to this trial, the majority of the brethren had become confident in the Lord as to the outcome of Paul's imprisonment and were preaching the word fearlessly. They had been stimulated to greater activity both by their zeal for Christ and love for Paul. The Imperial Court was not inclined to suppress the gospel nor punish these men against whom, like Paul, nothing could be proved except the spreading of a new Jewish doctrine. But there were others who preached Christ with ulterior motives, availing themselves of the opportunity afforded by Paul's imprisonment to gain precedence over him and lay claim to the field which he was compelled temporarily to vacate.⁸¹ Nevertheless, no matter by whom the cause of the gospel is promoted, and no matter with what feelings toward Paul himself its promotion is carried on, Paul rejoices at its progress.

Paul is firmly convinced that he will soon be set at liberty. When that occurs, he will send Timothy to Philippi to take his place for the near term. He also praises Epaphroditus, who has now recovered from near death and sends the letter to Philippi by him, since Epaphroditus longed to see them.

THE LETTER OF I PETER

Paul is released late in the summer of 63 but waits in Rome for Timothy. When Timothy arrives in the autumn of 63, Paul sends him to Philippi. Paul then sets out upon his journey to Spain in the autumn of 63 or spring of 64 at the latest.

While in Jerusalem, Peter learns of Paul's intentions to go to the far west upon being released from prison, possibly from Mark, who journeyed from Rome to Asia Minor sometime during the autumn of 62 or spring of 63. With Paul no longer in Rome, it is possible that Peter felt called to go there at once, since the Roman church was composed largely of native Jews, some of whom were Jewish Christians from Palestine. Peter journeys to Rome, arriving with Mark in the autumn of 63 or spring of 64 at the latest, and they labor together in Rome for not

81 Phil. 1:12-17.

more than a year. It is from Rome⁸² that Peter writes a letter, our I Peter, through Silas,⁸³ most likely early in the year 64, a few months before Peter was martyred.

The letter is written to the Gentile Christian churches in Asia Minor.⁸⁴ These churches were founded by Paul and his helpers, and their persecution had recently grown very severe. It was natural for Peter⁸⁵ to assume the care of these churches in Asia while Paul was undertaking his missionary journey to Spain of uncertain duration. The persecution that his readers were experiencing originated not from the authorities but from the populace, and it consisted mainly of slanders and insults against them as Christians and of blasphemous remarks about Christianity. Peter was personally unacquainted with these churches. On the other hand, Silas, who accompanied Paul on his second missionary journey, had become known to many of them, helping in their building up and even possibly in their founding. Mark too had come into personal contact with them when he made his journey to Asia Minor in the years 62-63. Therefore, Peter leaves the entire composition of this letter to Silas, as he regarded him as better fitted than himself to express the thoughts and feelings which he (Peter) had toward these Gentile Christians. He is quite confident as well that the readers will know that Silas has faithfully reproduced his sentiments. By speaking through Silas and sending greetings from him and Mark, Peter introduces himself to his readers in the most effective way possible, making the distance between them seem not so great.

In this letter we find Peter's unhesitating recognition of the divinely-blessed labors of the missionaries among the Gentiles and of the equal Christian standing of Gentile Christians and Jewish members of the mother church. He finds it necessary to give them some word of encouragement as regards their persecution and so calls to mind the letter James wrote some fifteen years earlier that had been such a help to them and other Christians. From beginning to end, the letter is filled with references to a recent unfavorable change in the situation of Christians, especially those in Asia. These changes consisted primarily of slanderous and injurious attacks upon them as Christians. They were looked upon as enemies of social order generally. The inner freedom from earthly concerns that Christians experience was regarded as a revolutionary spirit. Every fault observed in the conduct of individual Christians was attributed to their peculiar views, so that their words about freedom and service for God were regarded as cloaks for their hostility to social order and the State.

82 I Peter 5:13. There is no doubt in Zahn's mind (II:158-160) or in the minds of most modern scholars that "Babylon" refers to Rome, a name that suggests something of Rome's pride, luxury, immorality, and godlessness. It is very unlikely that ancient Babylon on the Euphrates is meant. The Jews were chased out of that city well before this time (Josephus, *Ant.* 18.371-379). Moreover, Babylon, long ago destroyed as a major city, was very much in decline at the time Peter wrote. There also was a military post in Egypt called Babylon, but there is no reason for thinking that this location was in view.

83 I Pet. 5:12. Silvanus is almost certainly Silas, Paul's long-time companion. "Through Silvanus [*dia Silouanou*]...I have written to you briefly." *dia* with the genitive means *through* or *by means of*. Some have suggested that this means Silas simply carried the letter to its destination, but the words seem to imply much more than that. Carson thinks that Peter used Silas as a "secretary" who polished up Peter's Greek (D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992], p. 422), while Zahn thinks Peter left the entire composition of the letter to Silas (II:150).

84 With the exception of those in Cilicia, which were more closely allied to the group of churches centering in Syrian Antioch.

85 Paul similarly wrote to churches he did not know personally (Romans, Ephesians, and Colossians); cf. Zahn, II:162.

The inevitable result was a defaming of the name of Christ Himself, whom they confessed and after whom they were called.

The opinion of the vast majority of the populace seemed to be that the extermination of the Christians would benefit the State and society. In view of this universal hatred heaped upon Christians, Peter urges his readers to a life of good conduct. This conduct will silence their slanderers and put them to shame. Peter exhorts his readers to refrain from evil and deceitful words, and above all, not to answer reviling with reviling, but with blessing.

THE GOSPEL OF MARK

In the year 64, John Mark prepares an account of Jesus' life. Mark the evangelist was a Levite, a cousin of Barnabas, but had not been a disciple of Jesus. Although he knew from personal experience a number of the facts he recorded, in general he had not heard Jesus' words nor witnessed his deeds. He was the son of a well-to-do Christian family in Jerusalem, and during the time of Jesus' ministry, a part of the mother Church often assembled in his home. It was here in Mark's home where Jesus celebrated his last Passover and where the Jerusalem Christians continued to do so after His death.⁸⁶ Therefore, although he included some personal experiences of his own, Mark was able to write about Jesus' life in general based upon the narratives that he heard from Peter, who would regularly come and go from Mark's home.⁸⁷ Beginning in the year 44, Mark was a constant companion of Paul and Barnabas, and most likely around 63-64 he once again found himself in the companionship of Peter in Rome.⁸⁸

Mark wrote his Gospel in Greek for Roman readers while he was in Rome. Since he was not a disciple of Jesus but rather of Peter, he was not able to write what he himself had seen and heard but was limited to Peter's discourses. These discourses by their very nature were not adapted to give a connected and chronological view of Jesus' work as a teacher. Instead, they consisted of separate stories intended for instruction or edification. Mark reproduced Peter's discourses accurately without leaving anything out or making any appreciable additions of his own. Only on occasion did he include events that he had experienced or witnessed himself.⁸⁹ His main purpose in writing was to set forth "the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,"⁹⁰ that is, the message of salvation brought into the world by Jesus, and he does this with vivid and clear narration. But why Mark broke off his narrative in the midst of

86 Acts 12:12. Zahn (II:428-429) supports the tradition that Jesus celebrated his last Passover in the house of John Mark when he was but a boy and that identifies the boy in Mark 14:51-52 as John Mark. No less a modern NT scholar than F. F. Bruce considers these identifications as "attractive and not improbable" (*The Acts of the Apostles* [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1951], p. 247).

87 See Acts 12:12-17; cf. 2:42,46; 5:42 (Zahn, II:430, 434-435).

88 I Pet. 5:13. Peter's designation of Mark as "my son" may imply that Mark was converted through Peter's influence and was possibly baptized by him (Zahn, II:427).

89 Possibly Mark 14:51-52, if the identification of the fleeing youth with Mark is correct. Cf. Zahn, II:441.

90 Mark 1:1. Zahn believes this to be an independent phrase intended as a title to the book (II:457). "Beginning" (*arche*) does not here mean *cause*, *principle*, or *ground*, but simply *beginning*, how the Gospel of Jesus Christ began.

the account of Jesus' resurrection, concluding with 16:8,⁹¹ is not known.⁹² Mark 16:9-20 is an appendix added by some unknown hand.

THE LETTER OF I TIMOTHY

The burning of Rome takes place the week of July 19-24, 64. This resulted in great persecution of the Christians under Nero, who, in order to avert suspicion from himself, had charged that they were responsible for the fire. By this time, the name "Christian" had become the object of popular hatred and of every evil suspicion. Nero's fury leads to the execution of large numbers of Christians in a most gruesome manner. Among them is Peter, who is crucified in the Vatican Gardens during the autumn of 64.

In the spring or autumn of 65, Paul returns from Spain and makes a tour of the churches in the eastern part of the empire. Timothy was not with him at this time. He stops at Crete, Macedonia, Miletus, Troas, and possibly Ephesus and Corinth, the exact order unknown, and possibly Nicopolis. It may be during this journey that Trophimus was left behind ill in Miletus and that Erastus remained in Corinth.⁹³

Timothy is currently in Ephesus carrying out Paul's commission to oversee the affairs of the church. He has been there for some time and writes Paul a letter stating his desire to accompany him on his current journey among the eastern churches. It may be that Timothy wished to escape the duties given him, urging his youth as an excuse for a certain lack of energy in the discharging of his office. He also writes to Paul of physical disorders that make him anxious about his health and have led him to abstain from wine. Paul writes I Timothy in reply to this letter. He has already set out on his journey to Macedonia, and he asks Timothy to remain in Ephesus and continue his work there until he arrives. This delay could be as long as two to three years. In his letter Paul gives Timothy specific instructions on how to fulfill his role of temporary representative of Paul in his apostolic capacity, not only in the church at Ephesus but in the surrounding churches in the province of Asia as well. He also touches upon religious and moral apathy, the temptations that the love of money brings, and warns Timothy against having anything to do with useless and unfruitful theoretical discussions and investigations.

Some time between the writing of this letter and Paul's second imprisonment in Rome, he and Timothy do see each other at least once more. Where they meet is uncertain, but it was

91 With Zahn's assessment that Mark 16:9-20 was not part of the original work, practically all of modern scholarship agrees. The UBS text gives the omission an "A" rating. The argument generally cited first is that the "heavenly twins" (a humorous reference to the two uncials given great importance by Westcott and Hort, Sinaiticus and Vaticanus) do not include the verses.

92 Carson (D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992], pp. 103-104), lists three possibilities for this abrupt ending of the Gospel at 16:8. (1) Mark may have intended to write more but was prevented from doing so by arrest or death (this is Zahn's suggestion, II:479-480); (2) Mark's original ending may have been lost in the transmission of the text; and (3) Mark may have actually intended to end the Gospel at 16:8. This third view is becoming more popular today and may accord well with Mark's tendency toward secrecy and understatement.

93 II Tim. 4:20.

not at Miletus, Troas, or Corinth. It was, however, a tearful parting.

THE LETTER TO TITUS

During Paul's journey in the eastern part of the empire, he and Titus stop at the island of Crete for a short stay. There were already Christians there, and although they had not been converted through the preaching of Paul or Titus, Paul believed them to be in his apostolic jurisdiction. As he had duties elsewhere, he leaves Titus to organize the yet unarranged affairs of the Christians on Crete.

Titus then writes Paul relating his difficulties in carrying out this commission, and Paul responds in a letter to Titus. Paul had been in Crete long enough to have met with opposition himself among the Cretan Christians, some of whom had not given him a kindly reception. He knows the special dangers that threaten the church. The main problem was men of Jewish origin who teach unsound and positively harmful doctrines, thereby creating schisms in the church. If after repeated warnings these men still persist in this activity, Titus is to leave them to the judgment of their own conscience. But to others he is to set forth strongly and sharply the error of their actions and silence them. He is not to let any man assume a contemptuous attitude toward him, as if he had said nothing or had not administered reproof. In opposition to what is said by the men creating difficulties for Titus, either by denying his commission and capacity for organizing the church or by giving instructions contrary to those left by Paul, Paul emphasizes the fact that it was he, Paul, *the apostle*, who had given Titus these instructions to carry out. To be sure, Paul does not wish to intimate that he is lord over other Christians, but he is, like them all, a servant of God. However, at the same time he is an apostle of Jesus Christ and by divine commission was entrusted with the preaching of the Word. Similarly, Paul has given Titus a commission to preach the Word, and this is to be borne in mind by the Christians among whom Titus works.

This letter to Titus was most likely delivered by Zenas the lawyer and Apollos. They were sent on a journey by Paul, the final destination unknown to us, with Crete being a stop on the first leg. Titus and the Cretan Christians are to furnish all they need for the journey and send them on their way again.

Titus' stay in Crete is of a temporary nature. Paul will send Artemas or Tychicus to him, at which time Titus should travel to Nicopolis to join Paul, since he intends to spend the winter there. Paul then stays in Nicopolis during the winter of 65-66. It is possible that he and Titus visit the neighboring province of Epirus at this time. When Paul leaves Nicopolis for Italy in the spring of 66, it may be that at the same time Titus sets out for Dalmatia and Crescens travels to Gaul for missionary work.⁹⁴

94 II Tim. 4:10. There is a textual variant here. "Galatia" is well-attested, but Zahn argues for identifying it with Gaul rather than the Galatia of Asia (II:11, 25).