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2 Peter and Jude

Session 1

1) Abstract, 2) Briefing Document, 3) Study Guide, 4) FAQs

1) Abstract

The provided text offers an in-depth **analysis of 2 Peter**, a New Testament letter, exploring its **setting, authorship, and theological themes**. It addresses the **doubt surrounding Peter's direct authorship**, considering both the possibility of a highly mediated text and pseudonymity, while still affirming its **apostolic content and intent**. The text highlights 2 Peter's **response to innovative teachers** who questioned Christ's return and divine judgment, linking their skepticism to **Epicurean philosophy**. Furthermore, it emphasizes 2 Peter's call for **Christian growth in virtue and holiness**, presenting salvation as an **ongoing journey** rather than a singular event.

2) Briefing Document: An Introduction to 2 Peter and its Core Themes

Source: Excerpts from "DeSilva_2Pet_Jude_EN_01.pdf" by Dr. David A. DeSilva

I. Introduction and Contextual Challenges of 2 Peter

2 Peter is a complex New Testament text that presents significant interpretive challenges, particularly regarding its authorship, audience, and relationship to other biblical books. While precise answers to these questions remain elusive, the **occasion and message of the letter** in response to presenting problems are clearer and form the crucial foundation for understanding its exhortation.

- **Authorship Doubt:** "There is substantial doubt concerning the authorship of the letter, and in what sense, if any, its contents are anchored in the words of the Apostle Peter himself." (p. 1) This doubt is not a modern phenomenon, as

Eusebius (early 4th century) and Jerome (5th century) also noted stylistic and conceptual differences from 1 Peter.

- **Linguistic Discrepancies:** The "dense, even otiose Greek style" of 2 Peter seems a "far reach for someone who was once a fisherman in Galilee." (p. 3-4) This contrasts significantly with the style of 1 Peter.
- **Greek Concepts:** 2 Peter contains "particularly Greek and quite un-Jewish" ideas, such as "salvation is conceived here as participating in the divine nature and escaping the decay present in the world caused by desire," and the use of "Tartarus" for the place of punishment. (p. 4)
- **Limited Jewish Scripture Verbiage:** Unlike 1 Peter, 2 Peter has "very little verbiage from the Jewish scriptures." (p. 4)
- **Theological Presuppositions (Calvin):** John Calvin believed 2 Peter "must have proceeded from Peter, not that he himself wrote it, but that someone of his disciples set forth in writing by his command" because "such a fiction would be unworthy of a minister of Christ." (p. 4) This highlights a key tension in interpreting ancient authorship.
- **Mediation Theory:** A common theory suggests Peter authorized a trusted associate (a "Christian wordsmith") to write the letter, mediating his thoughts and likely contributing to the style and expression. "The essence may indeed be Petrine. The actual expression certainly is not." (p. 4)
- **Pseudonymity Theory:** Many scholars favor the idea that a "faithful Christian writes a letter in Peter's name to bring the apostle's authority, and quite likely his teaching, to bear on problems that have arisen after Peter's death." (p. 5) This aligns with the "Testament" genre, which often features deathbed speeches, moral instruction, and predictions.
- **Indications of Pseudonymity:** These include Peter's reminiscences of the transfiguration and awareness of impending death, the letter's moral instruction, predictions of present and future crises, the skeptical words attributed to mockers (e.g., "Where is the promise of his coming?"), and the incorporation of heavily edited material from Jude. (p. 5-6)

- **Pseudonymity in the Ancient World:** While later rejected by the early church due to association with heresy, pseudonymity could sometimes be a "sincere tribute motivated by a desire to carry on or preserve the teaching of a revered figure," as seen with Pythagoras. (p. 6)
- **Conclusion on Authorship:** The question remains "elusive," but the letter "clearly represents apostolic content" and "apostolic intent," aiming to keep readers "aligned with... the faith delivered once for all to the saints." (p. 6) If Petrine authorship is affirmed, it must acknowledge the significant mediation.
- **Audience Location:** The letter provides "very little... information about the audience." (p. 7) While tempting to connect it to 1 Peter's audience in Asia Minor, the reference to Paul's letters, specifically Romans 2:4, makes this identification problematic for a direct correspondence. (p. 7) DeSilva prefers "not to hang too much on the identification of the audience of Second Peter with the audience of First Peter." (p. 7)
- **Hellenistic Influence:** 2 Peter is "one of the most Hellenized of New Testament texts." (p. 1) Its opening reads "like a benefactor inscription from a Greek city," and its closing resembles a "debate with preachers who have been too heavily influenced by the school of Epicurus." (p. 1)

II. The Core Message: Addressing Innovative Teachers and Skepticism

The primary **occasion** for 2 Peter's writing is "the activity of innovative teachers" who are introducing "destructive factions" and "denying the master who bought them." (p. 1) These teachers represent a significant threat to the Christian community.

- **Identity of False Teachers: Scoffers of the *Parousia*:** "Scoffers will come in the last of the days with contempt, walking in line with their own desires and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For since our fathers died, all things continue in the same way since the beginning of creation." (p. 1-2) This skepticism challenges the early Christian belief in Jesus' imminent return and divine judgment.
- **Epicurean Influence:** The skepticism of these teachers "has often been compared to that nurtured by Epicureanism." (p. 2)

- **Epicurean Beliefs:** Epicurus sought *ataraxia* (untroubled existence) by eliminating fear and anxiety. He taught that "gods do not concern themselves with punishing those who act wickedly or with favoring and rewarding those who act nobly." (p. 2)
- **Critique of Divine Judgment:** Epicureans pointed to the unpunished wicked as evidence against divine providence and judgment, aiming "to free people from religion's tyranny of fear." (p. 2)
- **Ethical Laxity:** A "somewhat frequent side effect" of Epicurean teaching was "a propensity to shake off conventional morality in favor of seizing the day, as it were, and taking one's fill of pleasure." (p. 2)
- **"Promising freedom" while being "slaves of corruption":** The author portrays the teachers as offering "freedom, an explicit Epicurean goal, while they themselves are slaves of corruption, a common consequence of Epicureanism lived poorly." (p. 3) This highlights their hypocrisy and the dangers of their teachings.
- **The Author's Response and Key Themes: Affirmation of Christ's Return and Judgment:** 2 Peter firmly defends the "apostolic and the scriptural testimony" concerning "Christ's coming in judgment, and to usher in a kingdom where righteousness has a home." (p. 1, 2) Chapter 3 confirms "a day of accountability before God" and "the dissolution of the present cosmos in favor of a new creation," echoing the Nicene Creed: "He will come again to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end." (p. 3)
- **Ethical Imperative and Holiness:** The denial of judgment has "serious consequences for ethical practice." (p. 3) The author "castigat[es] the ethical laxity of the rival teachers" and urges "the pursuit of righteousness and holiness among his audiences." (p. 3) This is a central "compass point" for life. (p. 1)
- **Transfiguration as Evidence:** The transfiguration of Jesus is presented as a "prophetic foreshadowing of the glory that Jesus will bear at his second coming" and "evidence for that second coming against the doubts raised by the rival teachers." (p. 3)

- **Salvation as Participation in Divine Nature and Escape from Corruption:** The author conceptualizes salvation in "very Greek terms," meaning "sharing in the divine nature, which would be understood to include immortality, moral perfection, and completeness." (p. 9) Simultaneously, it means "escaping from the corruption or the decay that is inherent in the material world, a decay that the author attributes to the effects of desire on the realm of human experience." (p. 9) This framework directly counters the Epicurean worldview.
- **The Problem of Desire:** While countercultural to modern sensibilities, the author views desire critically. "To give free rein to one's impulses, desires, and feelings... was to abandon the pursuit of the virtues that made a life worth having lived." (p. 9) Uncontrolled desire contributes to "the corruption of God's good world." (p. 9)
- **Holy Desire:** Conversely, "God has given us precious and very great promises, and the author would only encourage us to desire these things, becoming reflections of God's own righteousness." (p. 9-10)
- **The "Evacuation Route" of Christian Discipleship:** Salvation is not instantaneous but a process of "unrelenting growth into a life of widely recognized virtues." (p. 8) It is "a matter of following an evacuation route" that begins with faith and leads to "Christ's likeness." (p. 12)
- **The Sorites (Climax) of Virtues (1:5-7):** This rhetorical device lays out a chain of necessary virtues, each building on the last: "supply in your faith virtue in addition, and in your virtue, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, endurance, and in your endurance, godliness, and in your godliness, love for the brothers and sisters, and in your love for the brothers and sisters, love without boundaries." (p. 8, 10-11)
- **Faith + Virtue (arete):** Faith must "bear fruit in ethical transformation." (p. 11)
- **Virtue + Knowledge:** "Not esoteric knowledge but ever fuller knowledge of the equally valuable faith," leading to "experiential knowledge of living a life of moral excellence." (p. 11)
- **Knowledge + Self-Control:** Crucial where "desire is the principal source of the corruption." (p. 11)

- **Self-Control + Endurance:** Necessary "to keep up the energy for this flight over the long haul, maintaining resistance in the face of every enticement and distraction." (p. 11)
- **Endurance + Godliness/Piety:** "Living a life that has God at its center... giving to God what is God's due as the highest priority." (p. 11)
- **Godliness + Love for Brothers/Sisters (Philadelphia):** Characterized by "sharing ideals, sharing material resources, cooperating... preserving harmony, and forgiving offenses." (p. 11)
- **Philadelphia + Love without Boundaries (Agape):** "The love that depends on nothing external... but simply springs from a character that has at last arrived at the place where it shares in the divine nature of which the author was speaking. The divine nature of the God who is love." (p. 11)
- **Consequences of Lacking Virtues:** "For the people in whom these things are lacking are so short-sighted as to be blind, putting out of their minds the cleansing of their past sins." (p. 8, 12) This is equated with "the severest form of myopia" and "forgetfulness of benefactions," which was highly deplored in the ancient world. (p. 12)
- **Making Calling and Election Certain:** The author concludes by urging readers to "invest yourself fully in making your calling and selection certain." (p. 8, 12) This is achieved not through "lazy theological argument" but by "pursuing that lived response to God's calling and selection that makes us people who belong in the eternal kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ." (p. 13) This reflects a view of salvation as a "long obedience in the same direction, not a long inertia in the same pew." (p. 13)

III. The Nature of God and Jesus Christ

- **God as Benefactor:** The letter opens with language reminiscent of "inscriptions declaring a city's resolutions to honor its benefactors." (p. 8) God is celebrated for his "divine power has given us all things with a view to life and piety, who called us by his own glory and virtue, through which he has given to us the precious and very great promises." (p. 8)

- **Divinity of Jesus:** The opening salutation, "our God and Savior Jesus Christ" (1:1), is highlighted as a "strong[] suggest[ion] that the author is referring to a single entity," an "early assertion of the divinity of Jesus." (p. 8)
- **Jesus as Lord and Savior:** Throughout the letter, Jesus is referred to as "Lord and Savior," and entrance into "the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" is the ultimate goal. (p. 8, 10, 13)

In summary, 2 Peter, despite its complex background, delivers a clear and urgent message. It confronts skepticism regarding Christ's return and divine judgment, particularly influenced by Epicurean thought, and calls believers to a rigorous, ongoing ethical transformation. Salvation is presented as an active "evacuation route" away from the world's corruption through desire, leading to a life of escalating virtues culminating in boundless love, thereby making one's calling and election sure and securing entrance into God's eternal kingdom where righteousness resides.

3) Study Guide: Study Guide: 2 Peter and Jude - Session 1

This study guide is designed to help you review the key concepts and arguments presented in the provided excerpts from Dr. David A. DeSilva's "2 Peter and Jude, Session 1."

I. Overview of 2 Peter

- **Authorship & Setting:** Discusses the significant doubt surrounding the authorship of 2 Peter and the lack of clarity regarding the audience's location. Highlights that the occasion and message are clearer foundations for interpretation.
- **Relationship to Jude:** Notes 2 Peter's adaptation of Jude's warning to a new situation, emphasizing their distinct nature.
- **Hellenistic Influence:** Identifies 2 Peter as one of the most Hellenized New Testament texts, citing its opening (benefactor inscription) and closing (debate with Epicureans).

- **Core Message:** Outlines the two "principal compass points" for life presented in 2 Peter: redemption from past sins and Christ's coming in judgment and to usher in a kingdom of righteousness.
- **Purpose:** Written in response to innovative teachers, specifically false prophets/teachers who introduce destructive factions and deny Christ.

II. The Opposing Teachers and Their Views

- **Identity & Character:** Chapter 2 describes them as intruders with shameful character and ungodly practices, aiming to undermine their influence.
- **Scoffers' Argument (Chapter 3):** "Where is the promise of his coming? For since our fathers died, all things continue in the same way since the beginning of creation."
- Interpretations:
 - General statement about God's non-intervention in history.
 - Specific repudiation of early Christian belief in Jesus' imminent return and the coming of the Kingdom of God.
 - Context of Delay: The passing of a generation of apostles without seeing the kingdom come fueled doubts.
 - "Enlightened Christianity": These teachers may have sought a Christianity freed from "backward" Jewish apocalyptic notions.
- **Epicureanism as a Parallel: Ataraxia:** Epicurus's concept of the highest good as an untroubled existence, achieved by eliminating disturbing emotions.
- **Gods' Indifference:** Epicureans believed gods were undisturbed by human affairs, thus not concerned with judgment or reward.
- **Critique of Divine Judgment:** The unpunished wicked were cited as evidence against divine providence.
- **Freedom from Fear:** Epicurus aimed to free people from the "tyranny of fear" associated with religion.
- **Side Effect:** Often led to "seizing the day" and pursuing pleasure, despite Epicurus's own definition of pleasure as "undisturbedness."

- **2 Peter's Response:** The teachers' denial of divine judgment and future judgment is seen as an Epicurean critique. Their promise of "freedom" while being "slaves of corruption" is a common consequence of poorly lived Epicureanism.

III. Author's Defense and Ethical Imperatives

- **Confirmation of Promise:** Chapter 3 confirms the scriptural and apostolic promise of a day of accountability and a new creation, aligning with the Nicene Creed's affirmation of Christ's return to judge.
- **Ethical Consequences:** Denial of judgment leads to ethical laxity (seen in Chapter 2's castigation of teachers), while affirmation demands pursuit of righteousness and holiness (urged in Chapter 3).
- **Transfiguration (Chapter 1):** Presented as prophetic foreshadowing and evidence for Jesus' second coming, countering doubts.
- **Christian Life as a Journey:** Cleansing from past sins impels believers toward holiness and righteousness, countering the teachers' ethical trajectory.

IV. Authorship Debate of 2 Peter

- **Claim of Petrine Authorship:** Explicitly stated at the beginning ("Simeon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ"). The double name reinforces this. Written shortly before his martyrdom (AD 64-68).
- **"Slave" and "Apostle":** Implications of acting on behalf of Jesus, honor as a representative, and invested authority.
- **Arguments Against Direct Petrine Authorship: Greek Style:** Dense and otiose, unlike a Galilean fisherman, and different from 1 Peter.
- **Greek Concepts:** Salvation as "participating in the divine nature" and "escaping decay" are very Greek notions. "Tartarus" as a place of punishment is a specific Greek term.
- **Lack of Jewish Scripture:** Unusual compared to 1 Peter.
- **Historical Doubt:** Eusebius (4th century) and Jerome (5th century) noted stylistic discrepancies.

- **Proposed Solutions to Preserve Petrine Connection: Secretarial/Mediated Authorship (Jerome & Calvin):** Peter authorized the letter, but a trusted associate or disciple (an "interpreter" or "wordsmith") supplied the specific wording and expression. The "essence" is Petrine, but the "expression" is not. This allows for stylistic differences.
- **Pseudonymous Authorship Scenario: Contextual Factor: "Testament" Genre:** A faithful Christian writes in Peter's name *after* his death to apply his authority and teaching to post-Petrine problems.
- Similarities to Testaments: Reminiscences of Peter's experience (Transfiguration), awareness of impending death, moral instruction, predictions of crisis and God's intervention.
- Letter form: More appropriate for an apostle's testament.
- **Indications of Pseudonymity: Skeptic's Observation:** "Where is the promise of his coming? Ever since the fathers fell asleep..." This argument has greater force *after* the death of the apostles who were with Jesus.
- **Future Tense Predictions, Present Tense Application:** Suggests the author is asserting apostolic predictions are *now* being fulfilled.
- **Incorporation of Jude:** Heavy editing of Jude's material might align more with a post-apostolic author.
- **Ancient Pseudonymity:** Not always seen as deception; could be sincere tribute (e.g., Pythagoras's students publishing under his name).
- **Major Obstacle:** Early church leaders rejected pseudonymity, especially due to its use by heretical groups. This led to affirming authenticity for canonical works like 2 Peter.
- **Conclusion on Authorship:** Remains an elusive question due to conflicting evidence. However, the letter clearly represents "apostolic content" and "apostolic intent" (preserving the faith "once for all delivered to the saints"). If Petrine authorship is affirmed, it must acknowledge high mediation.

V. Audience of 2 Peter

- **Salutation:** "Simeon Peter... to those who have received a faith of equal value to ours..." (reveals Christian audience, but little else).
- **"Second Letter":** Reference to an earlier letter (Chapter 3) tempts identification with 1 Peter (audience in Western Asia Minor).
- Caution: Peter may have written other lost letters.
- Problematic Paul reference: Paul's teaching on God's patience leading to repentance is primarily in Romans 2:4, not necessarily known by a general audience in Western Turkey.
- **Author's Esteem:** Expresses goodwill and underscores the value of the audience's received faith, which included conviction of judgment and the temporary nature of the present creation. This prepares them to resist skeptics.
- **Early Assertion of Jesus' Divinity:** "Our God and Savior Jesus Christ" (a single entity), indicating a high Christology.
- **Purpose of Opening:** To provide a philosophically respectable yet orthodox faith, demonstrating Christianity's ability to withstand criticism without sacrificing core tenets.

VI. Christian Discipleship: The Evacuation Route

- **Unrelenting Growth:** Discipleship is a process of growth into widely recognized virtues, empowered by God.
- **"Participants in the Divine Nature":** Salvation conceptualized in Greek terms as sharing immortality, moral perfection, and completeness.
- **"Escaping Corruption through Desire":** Salvation also means fleeing decay in the material world, attributed to desire's effects.
- **Desire in Greco-Roman Ethics:** Reason must control desires for a virtuous life. Uncontrolled impulses lead to vice.
- **2 Peter's Warning:** Desire contributes to corruption (greed, sexual desire, distractions).

- **Holy Desire:** Desire for God's promises leads to righteousness and lavish entrance into the eternal kingdom.
- **Salvation as a Journey/Evacuation Route:** Not instantaneous teleportation, but a diligent following of a path.
 1. **Sorites/Climax (Chain of Virtues - 2 Peter 1:5-7): Faith:** The starting point.
 2. **Virtue (aretē):** Moral excellence, ethical transformation.
 3. **Knowledge:** Fuller understanding of faith, equipping for self-control.
 4. **Self-Control:** Essential where desire causes corruption.
 5. **Endurance:** To persist in the journey against enticements and cultural forces (self-gratification).
 6. **Godliness/Piety:** God at the center, highest priority.
 7. **Love for Brothers and Sisters (Philadelphia):** Sharing ideals, resources, cooperation, harmony, forgiveness.
 8. **Love without Boundaries (Agape):** Springs from divine nature, unconditional.
- **Consequences of Lacking Virtues:** "Unproductive or unfruitful," "short-sighted as to be blind," "putting out of their minds the cleansing of their past sins."
- **Forgetfulness of Benefactions:** Considered deplorable in ancient world (Cicero, Seneca). Failure to remember Jesus' costly cleansing.
- **Making Calling and Selection Certain:** Not by lazy theological arguments, but by diligently pursuing the "evacuation route" and living out a graceful response to God's calling. This leads to sure entrance into the eternal kingdom.
- **Wesleyan Connection:** Parallels with John Wesley's view of salvation as a lifelong commitment to growing in holiness and righteousness, driven by love for God and neighbor. Salvation is a "long obedience in the same direction."

Quiz: 2 Peter and Jude - Session 1

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What are the two "principal compass points" for life that 2 Peter lays out for its readers?
2. Who are the "innovative teachers" that 2 Peter is written to oppose, and what is one key belief they challenge?
3. How does the skepticism of the opposing teachers in 2 Peter 3:3-4 relate to the concept of Epicureanism?
4. Explain what the Epicurean concept of *ataraxia* is and how it connects to their view of divine judgment.
5. What specific event from Jesus' life does the author of 2 Peter use as evidence for Jesus' second coming and against the doubts of the rival teachers?
6. List two significant characteristics of 2 Peter's Greek style or concepts that cause scholars to question direct Petrine authorship.
7. How do Jerome and John Calvin propose to reconcile the claim of Petrine authorship with the stylistic difficulties of 2 Peter?
8. Describe the "Testament" genre and explain how 2 Peter exhibits similarities to this genre, supporting the pseudonymous authorship theory.
9. According to the author of 2 Peter, what does salvation involve, beyond an "isolated decision"?
10. Name at least three virtues from the "chain of concepts" (sorites/climax) that the author urges believers to supply in their faith.

Quiz Answer Key

1. The two principal compass points for life laid out in 2 Peter are our redemption by Christ from past sins and Christ's coming in judgment to usher in a kingdom where righteousness has a home. These foundational truths challenge believers to consider what kind of people they ought to be.
2. The "innovative teachers" are described as false prophets and teachers who "sneakily introduce destructive factions" and "deny the master who bought

them." A key belief they challenge is the promise of Christ's coming, asserting that "all things continue in the same way since the beginning of creation."

3. The skepticism of the opposing teachers, particularly their question "Where is the promise of his coming?", brings an Epicurean critique to bear on the Christian gospel. Epicureans believed gods were undisturbed by human affairs and thus did not concern themselves with punishing or rewarding, making the idea of divine judgment seem like superstition.
4. *Ataraxia* is Epicurus's concept of the highest good, meaning an untroubled existence achieved by eliminating emotions and stimuli that cause disturbance. This belief led to the conclusion that gods, possessing *ataraxia*, would not concern themselves with human affairs, including divine providence or judgment.
5. The author of 2 Peter uses the event of the Transfiguration of Jesus as evidence for Jesus' second coming. He presents it as a prophetic foreshadowing of the glory Jesus will bear and a direct counter-argument to the doubts raised by the rival teachers.
6. Two significant characteristics include the dense, even otiose, Greek style of the letter, which seems too sophisticated for a Galilean fisherman, and the presence of particularly Greek notions of salvation, such as participating in the divine nature and escaping decay caused by desire.
7. Jerome and John Calvin propose that while the "essence" of the letter may be Petrine, the actual "expression" or wording was supplied by a trusted associate, interpreter, or disciple. This "mediated authorship" theory suggests Peter authorized the letter but did not personally write it in its final form.
8. The "Testament" genre purports to contain the deathbed speech of a celebrated figure, giving instructions and often including personal reminiscences and future predictions. 2 Peter resembles this genre through Peter's reminiscences of the Transfiguration, his awareness of impending death, moral instruction, and predictions of present and future crises.
9. According to the author of 2 Peter, salvation is not just a single, isolated decision but a lifelong process of following an "evacuation route." This route

begins with faith and impels believers on a journey toward Christ's likeness, growing in holiness and righteousness by actively pursuing God's purposes.

10. Three virtues from the chain include: faith, virtue (moral excellence), knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, love for brothers and sisters (*Philadelphia*), and love without boundaries (*Agape*). (Any three are acceptable.)

Essay Format Questions (No Answers)

1. Discuss the different scholarly perspectives on the authorship of 2 Peter. What are the main arguments for and against direct Petrine authorship, and how do proposed solutions attempt to reconcile these views?
2. Analyze the portrayal of the "innovative teachers" in 2 Peter. How does their skepticism, particularly regarding Christ's coming and divine judgment, align with or diverge from the philosophical tenets of Epicureanism, and how does the author of 2 Peter counter their arguments?
3. Explore the concept of "desire" in 2 Peter. How does the author present its negative effects on the world and human experience, and what is the role of "holy desire" in the Christian's "evacuation route" towards salvation?
4. Examine the "chain of concepts" (sorites) presented in 2 Peter 1:5-7 as a path to Christian discipleship. Explain each virtue in the sequence and discuss how their cultivation ensures productivity and entrance into the eternal kingdom.
5. Compare and contrast the understanding of salvation in 2 Peter with modern evangelical perspectives. How does the author's emphasis on a continuous "evacuation route" and ongoing ethical transformation challenge or reinforce contemporary ideas about "being saved"?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Agape:** A Greek term for love, often used in early Christian discourse to denote a love that is unconditional, self-sacrificing, and dependent on nothing external, springing from a character that shares in the divine nature.

- **Apostle:** A designated envoy or representative of Jesus Christ, invested with his authority. In 2 Peter, Peter identifies himself as both a slave and an apostle, signifying his complete devotion and authorized role.
- **Aretē (Virtue):** A Greek word meaning moral excellence or commitment to the highest ethical standards. In 2 Peter, it is the first quality believers are urged to add to their faith, emphasizing ethical transformation.
- **Ataraxia:** An Epicurean concept referring to an untroubled existence, the highest good, achieved by the elimination of disturbing emotions like fear, anger, anxiety, and craving.
- **Epicureanism:** An influential Greek philosophical school founded by Epicurus (4th-3rd centuries BC) that identified the highest good as *ataraxia* and believed the gods were undisturbed by human affairs, thus unconcerned with human morality or judgment.
- **Evacuation Route:** A metaphor used in 2 Peter to describe salvation not as an instantaneous event, but as a diligent, lifelong journey of growth in holiness and righteousness, moving away from the corruption of the world towards God's eternal kingdom.
- **Hades/Sheol:** Generic terms for the realm of the dead in Greek and Hebrew thought, respectively. 2 Peter uses the more specific Greek term "Tartarus" for the place of punishment.
- **Hellenized:** Heavily influenced by Greek language, culture, and thought. 2 Peter is described as one of the most Hellenized New Testament texts, reflecting Greek rhetorical styles and philosophical concepts.
- **Philadelphia:** A Greek term meaning "love for the brothers and sisters," referring to the affection and commitment that should characterize sibling relationships, particularly among Christians in the household of God.
- **Pseudonymity:** The practice of writing under a false name or attributing authorship to a celebrated figure from the past. In the ancient world, it could be an act of deception or a sincere tribute. It is a key aspect of the debate surrounding 2 Peter's authorship.

- **Simeon Peter:** The double name used in the opening of 2 Peter, explicitly claiming the Apostle Peter as the author of the letter.
- **Sorites (Climax):** A rhetorical device involving a chain of concepts, where each concept serves as a link leading to the next in a series, often used to lay out a path or its consequences (as seen in 2 Peter 1:5-7).
- **Tartarus:** A specific Greek mythological term referring to the deepest part of the underworld, a realm of punishment. Its use in 2 Peter is cited as evidence of the letter's Hellenistic influence.
- **Testament (Genre):** An ancient literary genre purporting to contain the deathbed speech of a celebrated figure, often including moral instructions, personal reminiscences, and predictions concerning the future. Scholars find similarities between 2 Peter and this genre.
- **Transfiguration:** The event described in the Gospels where Jesus' appearance was transformed and glorified on a mountain. In 2 Peter, it is presented as a prophetic foreshadowing and evidence for Jesus' second coming.

4) FAQs

What is the primary occasion and message of 2 Peter?

2 Peter was written to address the activity of "innovative teachers" who were introducing destructive ideas, denying core Christian beliefs, and promoting ungodly practices. The letter's main themes revolve around two "compass points" for life: redemption from past sins through Christ and Christ's future coming in judgment to establish a kingdom of righteousness. It challenges readers to live lives that honor their costly redemption and prepare them for God's new creation. The letter also aims to counteract skepticism about Christ's second coming and divine judgment, potentially influenced by Epicurean philosophy, by reaffirming apostolic and scriptural testimony.

What were the specific challenges posed by the "innovative teachers" addressed in 2 Peter?

The innovative teachers challenged the early Christian belief in Jesus' swift return and the "Day of the Lord," arguing that since the "fathers" (apostles and early followers) had died without seeing these events, all things continued as they had since creation. This skepticism, often compared to Epicurean thought, questioned divine providence and judgment, implying that God does not concern himself with punishing the wicked or rewarding the noble. These teachers likely promoted a "more enlightened Christianity" free from "Jewish apocalyptic notions," which they might have considered backward. Their teachings often led to ethical laxity, promising "freedom" while themselves being "slaves of corruption."

How does 2 Peter respond to the skepticism about Christ's return and divine judgment?

2 Peter directly confronts the "scoffers" who ask, "Where is the promise of his coming?" The author dedicates much of chapter 3 to confirming the scriptural and apostolic promise of a day of accountability before God and the dissolution of the present cosmos in favor of a new creation. The Transfiguration of Jesus is presented as prophetic foreshadowing and evidence for Jesus' second coming. The letter emphasizes that God's patience is meant to lead people to repentance, not to suggest an absence of future judgment. It reinforces the Nicene Creed's conviction that Christ "will come again to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end."

What are the main points of debate regarding the authorship of 2 Peter?

The letter explicitly presents itself as written by "Simeon Peter." However, several characteristics raise doubts among scholars:

1. **Greek Style:** The dense and elaborate Greek style seems too advanced for a Galilean fisherman like Peter, and it differs significantly from 1 Peter.
2. **Greek Concepts:** Some concepts are distinctively Greek and less Jewish, such as salvation as "participating in the divine nature" and escaping "decay present in the world caused by desire," or the use of "Tartarus" for the place of punishment.
3. **Lack of Jewish Scripture Verbiage:** Unlike 1 Peter, 2 Peter contains very little language from Jewish scriptures.

Historical figures like Eusebius and Jerome also noted these discrepancies. Jerome and John Calvin proposed that Peter might have used an interpreter or secretary who shaped the letter's specific wording and style, with the "essence" remaining Petrine.

What are the two main scenarios proposed for the authorship of 2 Peter?

1. **Petrine Authorization (Highly Mediated):** Peter authorized a trusted associate to write the letter in his name. This associate heavily influenced the style, expression, and to an unknown extent, the content. This view maintains a direct connection to Peter while acknowledging the stylistic and conceptual differences.
2. **Pseudonymous Authorship:** A faithful Christian wrote the letter in Peter's name after Peter's death to leverage the apostle's authority and teaching against new problems, particularly the rival teachers. This scenario points to similarities with the ancient "Testament" genre (containing deathbed instructions and prophecies) and observations that the skeptical questions about Christ's return would have gained force after the apostles' deaths.

While pseudonymity was sometimes seen as tribute, the early church generally rejected it due to its widespread use in promoting heretical beliefs, making canonical acceptance of 2 Peter reliant on affirming its apostolic authenticity.

How does 2 Peter conceptualize "salvation" and "desire"?

In 2 Peter, salvation is presented in distinctly Greek terms as "sharing in the divine nature," which includes immortality, moral perfection, and completeness. Simultaneously, salvation means "escaping from the corruption or the decay that is inherent in the material world," a decay attributed to the "effects of desire on the realm of human experience."

The author presents desire as largely negative, a force that contributes to the "corruption, the ruin that is in the world" through greed, warped relationships, and distractions. While acknowledging "holy desire" for God's promises, the author emphasizes the Greco-Roman ethical principle that reason must always maintain control over desires to achieve a virtuous life. This perspective contrasts with modern cultural encouragement of desire for material goods and pleasures.

What is the "evacuation route" for salvation described in 2 Peter?

Salvation is not an instantaneous event but a process, an "evacuation route" that requires diligent effort. It begins with "faith" but extends into a journey of continuous growth in virtues. The author uses a rhetorical device called "sorites" (a chain of concepts) to outline this path:

- **Faith**
- **Virtue (moral excellence)**
- **Knowledge (of faith and its benefits)**
- **Self-control (essential for resisting corrupting desires)**
- **Endurance (to sustain the journey)**
- **Godliness (living with God at the center)**
- **Love for brothers and sisters (Philadelphia, characterized by sharing and cooperation)**
- **Love without boundaries (Agape, unconditional love reflecting God's nature)**

This progression is not optional; lacking these qualities signifies spiritual short-sightedness and a forgetting of the costly cleansing from past sins. Following this route ensures a rich entrance into "the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

How does 2 Peter challenge conventional notions of salvation and Christian living?

2 Peter challenges the idea of salvation as merely an "isolated decision" at the beginning of the Christian life. Instead, it frames salvation as a lifelong "evacuation route" towards Christ-likeness and holiness. The author emphasizes that "salvation and safety lie at the end of the evacuation route, not at its beginning." This requires "long obedience in the same direction," not "long inertia in the same pew."

The letter urges believers to actively make their "calling and selection certain" by diligently pursuing the path of virtues, rather than seeking "lazy theological arguments" to excuse themselves from ethical practice. It links assurance of salvation directly to a lived response—a continuous pursuit of righteousness and

holiness that reflects God's costly investment in them and prepares them for a place where "righteousness is at home."