

# The Authenticity of 2 Peter: Problems and Possible Solutions

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## RÉSUMÉ

Les spécialistes non évangéliques considèrent aujourd'hui la seconde épître de Pierre comme pseudonyme. Cet article considère les sept points problématiques que l'on allègue à l'appui de cette opinion et tente de montrer qu'ils ne sont pas décisifs. 1) Les destinataires sont les mêmes que ceux de la première épître de Pierre : il s'agit de chrétiens d'Asie Mineure. 2) La lettre se présente comme un testament spirituel de l'apôtre. 3) L'auteur indique comme son nom personnel *symeôn*. 4) En 2 Pierre, les lettres de Paul sont assimilées aux Écritures,

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## SUMMARY

In contemporary scholarship, 2 Peter is considered a pseudonymous epistle. However, by evaluating the seven main problematic points that are usually put forward, this article aims to show that none of them is insurmountable. (1) The addressees are the same as in 1 Peter, namely Christians in Asia Minor. (2) The document wants to be read as a spiritual testament of Peter. (3) The writer uses the personal name *Συμεών* as his signature. (4) Paul's letters are compared in 2 Peter with 'the other Scriptures'

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## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die gegenwärtige Lehrmeinung hält den zweiten Petrusbrief für ein Pseudonym. Dieser Artikel bewertet die sieben hauptsächlich, strittigen Punkte, die für gewöhnlich angeführt werden, und will dadurch beweisen, dass keiner von ihnen unüberwindlich ist. (1) Die Adressaten sind dieselben wie im ersten Petrusbrief, nämlich die Christen in Kleinasien. (2) Das Dokument will als geistliches Vermächtnis von Petrus gelesen werden. (3) Der Schreiber benutzt den Eigennamen *Συμεών* als Unterschrift. (4) Die Briefe von Paulus werden im zweiten Petrusbrief mit „den anderen Schriften“ ver-

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comme Paul le ferait lui-même. 5) 2 Pierre et Jude tirent leur origine d'une tradition orale de prédication apostolique. 6) Le style digne de l'épître correspond au caractère d'un testament, tandis que les différences stylistiques par rapport à 1 Pierre peuvent s'expliquer par la différence de situation dans laquelle chacune de ces lettres a vu le jour. 7) Les moqueurs ne doutaient pas spécifiquement d'un retour de Christ imminent, mais plus largement de l'intervention divine dans l'histoire humaine. L'auteur conclut que l'épître est une authentique lettre de l'apôtre Pierre.

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like Paul himself would do. (5) Both 2 Peter and Jude originate from an oral tradition of apostolic preaching. (6) The dignified style of 2 Peter corresponds with the testamentary character, while the stylistic difference with 1 Peter can be explained by the different situations in which these letters originated. (7) The scoffers were not specifically questioning the immediate Second Coming of Christ but more broadly the intervention of God in the history of mankind. In conclusion: 2 Peter is an authentic letter of which the apostle Peter is the author.

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glichen, wie Paulus selbst das getan haben würde. (5) Sowohl der zweite Petrusbrief als auch der Judasbrief entstammen einer mündlichen Tradition apostolischer Verkündigung. (6) Der distinktierte Stil von 2. Petrus entspricht seinem Charakter als geistliches Vermächtnis, wobei die stilistischen Unterschiede zu 1. Petrus durch die unterschiedlichen Situationen zu erklären sind, in denen diese Briefe entstanden. (7) Die Spötter stellten nicht speziell die Parousie des Christus in Frage, sondern eher allgemein das Eingreifen Gottes in die Geschichte der Menschheit. Fazit: Der zweite Petrusbrief ist ein authentisches Schreiben, dessen Autor der Apostel Petrus selbst ist.

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The authenticity of 2 Peter is widely disputed. In fact, the vast majority of contemporary scholars are convinced that this epistle cannot have been written by the apostle Peter himself. 2 Peter is regarded as a document in which people wanted to formulate and to preserve certain authoritative traditions in the Christian church under the pseudonym of 'Peter.' Differences of opinion remain only about the question of how far these traditions actually go back to the apostle Peter himself.

When, in a sermon about the fall of Jericho, the Alexandrian church father Origen compared the city walls to human reasoning, he let the apostles blow the trumpets. Among them, Origen says, 'Peter also blew the two trumpets of his epistles.' From this statement I borrowed the title for my dissertation, written in Dutch: *De tweede trompet* [The Second Trumpet], published in 1988.<sup>1</sup> In my dissertation, I seek to answer these questions: Is the sound of the second trumpet different from the first? Is the second trumpet a period instrument? In regard to the authorship of 2 Peter, I offered an integrated discussion of the general problems pertaining to the letter's authenticity along with an exegesis of the full text. Two decades later this article presents a condensed and updated English version of the main results of my research.<sup>2</sup>

Various handbooks and commentaries provide an overview of the debate concerning the authenticity of 2 Peter.<sup>3</sup> The new Dutch Bible translation of 2004 [*De Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling*] contains a popularized version of the debate. The translation presents itself as a standard Bible for all Dutch-speaking people and is widely distributed. The introductions to the various Bible books can be taken as expressing today's consensus among biblical scholars. The introduction to 2 Peter lists seven problematic points regarding its authorship. Following these seven points, I would like to consider the problems 2 Peter poses and the possible solutions we can find.

### **1. Second Peter lacks the marks of a personal letter. The addressees, for instance, are not specifically mentioned.**

2 Peter does not at any point identify the addressees. One could take this as an indicator of fiction. Nevertheless, the letter does start with personal greetings and a blessing for its readers: 'To those who through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: Grace and peace may be yours in

abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord' (2 Pet 1:1b-2).

Are these opening words part of the usual *captatio benevolentiae*?<sup>4</sup> That does not seem to be the case. The author seems rather to identify himself with the apostles.<sup>5</sup> Their authority gets pre-eminence. The first personal pronoun plural 'we' is an apostolic plural. The Greek word ἰσοτιμος is a New Testament *hapax*. It wants to express: 'of equal significance or value' according to Louw/Nida.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, by no means would Peter's faith be more valuable than that of his readers. They are all privileged by having received the same precious faith due to the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ. Peter gives all believers the same status. In regard to this equality in the Kingdom, the readers are subsequently addressed as brothers and sisters (1:10: ἀδελφοί).

In 3:1 a reference is made to a previous letter addressed to the same people: 'Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking.' Following the majority of exegetes, this is to be understood as a reference to the first letter of Peter.<sup>7</sup> Though it must be admitted that the subject of remembrance is dealt with explicitly in 2 Peter only, yet it is also true that 1 Peter is so steeped in the teachings of apostles and prophets that in each chapter such teaching actually forms the basis for the call to be sound in doctrine and life.<sup>8</sup> This observation also shows us that the addressees are actually identified indirectly. Via the heading of 1 Peter, we are directed to a bond of churches in Asia Minor.

2 Peter 1:16-18 shows that the readers in Asia Minor were familiar with the apostolic preaching of Peter and his fellow apostles. The speaker in this passage witnessed Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain. With a few catchwords, he can remind his readers of the fundamentals of the faith they have in common. He says: 'We were eyewitnesses of his majesty.' This passage is no literary construction, for we have sufficient evidence to consider this brief eyewitness report as authentic.<sup>9</sup> The proclamation of 'the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ' is a trustworthy witness. Somehow this apostolic preaching of Peter and his fellow apostles had reached the believers in Asia Minor, either by means of a visit of Peter himself or through Silas, whose visit was announced in 1 Peter 5:12 (see point 6).



## 2. The letter belongs to the genre of 'testament'. In Jewish and Christian circles this genre was popular during the Greek-Roman era.

As parallel fictional testaments from Jewish circles, one usually cites: *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, *The Testament of Moses*, *The Testament of Job* as well as parts of other writings, such as *1 Enoch*, *Tobit*, *2 Baruch*, *Jubilees*. They often include the announcement of impending death, the prediction of coming events and an exhortation to a right walk of life. It is very rare, though, that such a fictional testament is put in the form of a letter. However, we can refer to canonical examples such as Deuteronomy 32 being the spiritual testament of Moses and Acts 20 being the farewell sermon of Paul to the elders of Ephesus, the city where he had worked the most.

The question of genre is related to the question of authenticity, but in itself the genre of testament does not make a text fictional. Ellis rightly remarks that the reasoning usually followed is an invalid syllogism such as this: 'Some Jewish letter-form testaments are fictional; II Peter is a Jewish letter-form testament; *ergo*, II Peter is fictional.' It is fallacious, he adds, to draw conclusions about a particular letter from general or typical characteristics of a genre with which it may have some affinity.<sup>10</sup> After all, the overarching genre category to which 2 Peter belongs is the letter (3:1: ἐπιστολή), but this particular text was written in the form of a farewell letter.

Especially in 1:12-15, Peter is focussing on his 'departure' (ἔξοδος) from life. The tent pegs of his earthly life will soon be pulled, as Jesus had already made clear to him (cf. John 21:18-19 where in a concealed way Peter was made ready for martyrdom). He writes: For that reason, I will make every effort to see that after my 'departure' you will always be able to remember the apostolic witness. So, the second letter of Peter indeed carries a testamentary character. It obviously wants to be read as the apostle's spiritual testament.<sup>11</sup>

## 3. Peter is said to be the writer of 2 Peter; yet many interpreters believe that he is not the author.

There is a great contrast between the claim in the text regarding its author on the one hand and the prevailing opinion about that claim on the other hand. No one has expressed himself more bluntly

about this contrast than Kümmel. In his classic *Introduction* he says: The letter clearly claims to have been written by the apostle Peter, yet 'Peter cannot have written this epistle'.<sup>12</sup> This view is widely held today. Most scholars believe that in 2 Peter we have to do with the literary form of pseudepigraphy.<sup>13</sup> According to them, an unknown author wrote the letter under a pseudonym, the name of the apostle Peter. However, the question why that happened does not receive a unanimous answer. Let me give three examples of different answers, those of Meade, Riedl and Smith.

Meade points to a continuation of the normative tradition. In a new era that tradition met new challenges. A new time required the actualization of the thoughts and convictions of leading persons from the past (*Vergegenwärtigung*). 'Attribution in the pseudonymous Pauline and Petrine epistles must be regarded primarily as an assertion of authoritative tradition, not of literary origin.'<sup>14</sup> However, from sources available to us, one cannot prove that readers perceived the fiction of such writings or that they accepted that a contemporary author in fact wrote such writings.<sup>15</sup>

Riedl agrees with Meade in connecting pseudepigraphy with the term of 'anamnesis'. As in the Jewish tradition one existentially felt connected with the forefathers by remembrance, so an unknown author assumed the role of the apostle Peter by remembrance. He imagined that with the authority of Peter he could contradict rising heresy in the Christian church. However, even Riedl himself indicates that there is an essential difference between this kind of anamnesis and 2 Peter: never before was such remembrance imagined under the disguise of another person.<sup>16</sup>

Smith takes a different approach. He believes that 2 Peter has been written in response to a Petrine controversy in early Christianity. According to Smith, the adoption of the Peter-pseudonym by the actual author was a result of the opponents' attitude towards the apostle. Hence the ascription of the letter to Peter formed a part of the author's polemic against his adversaries. Because the author shared some of their Gnostic ideas, 2 Peter is not quite the orthodox document that it is often believed to be.<sup>17</sup> However, this rather bold assumption of Smith requires a very late dating of 2 Peter, in the second half of the second century.

More and more the question is asked whether pseudepigraphy is in conflict with canonicity.<sup>18</sup> On the basis of a series of declarations from church authorities, Baum shows that pseudepigraphy was



not tolerated in early Christianity where that kind of writing was perceived as a form of deception. Such writings were rejected out of hand as falsifications, even if the content was orthodox.<sup>19</sup> As a matter of fact, copies of falsified apostolic letters hardly exist.<sup>20</sup> Wilder shows that in the ancient world, the concept of literary property regarded it to be illegitimate to fictitiously ascribe literary works to a person other than their actual author. Furthermore, in the early Christian church, orthodox theologians would not knowingly have accepted such works into the canon. Wilder thinks that if the author had the aim to mislead, he succeeded in doing so.<sup>21</sup> However, in that case it would have been consistent to remove 2 Peter from the New Testament canon just as it had happened to other pseudepigrapha.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, the very fact that 2 Peter was eventually accepted as a canonical book presumes that the early Christians were sure that the apostle Peter wrote it.<sup>23</sup> And one obvious reason why they took so long to accept this letter can be found in the abundance of pseudo-Petrine literature circulating at that time: the *Gospel of Peter*, the *Preaching of Peter*, the *Acts of Peter*, the *Apocalypse of Peter*, the *Letter of Peter to Philip*.

I am of the opinion that the 'signature' in the heading of 2 Peter, Συμεών Πέτρος, bears the stamp of genuineness. Some manuscripts, particularly the old Papyrus 72 and Codex Vaticanus, have changed Συμεών into Σίμων, the common personal name. But the more difficult and therefore probably correct reading must be the Greek transcription of the Hebrew name. So far, falsification of this signature has appeared impossible for two main reasons. First, it is not a copy or variation of the signature above 1 Peter (which would require Πέτρος or Συμεών Πέτρος). Second, the form Συμεών is not an archaism, because the famous Bar Kochba and two of his officers also carried that name.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, verification of the signature is not impossible since the apostles and the Jerusalem elders presumably used to call each other by their original names (see Acts 15:14: Συμεών from the mouth of James!). The form Συμεών is also an indication that a Palestinian is speaking. Another person could not have allowed himself such freedom in spelling this name; only the author himself could, and perhaps his trusted secretary.<sup>25</sup> In his spiritual testament, the apostle Peter could have spelled his own personal name this way.

#### 4. In 3:15-16 reference is made to a collection of Paul's letters, which indicates that at that time those letters carried some authority in the church.

The idea that already in the time of the apostles the epistles of Paul would have been collected and placed on the same level as the other books of Scripture is usually considered anachronistic. This assumption would betray the pseudonymous author. In opposition to this thinking it can be pointed out that the writer of 2 Peter does not hold an elaborate concept of inspiration. He merely refers his readers to the wisdom given to Paul. Moreover, the author also admits that the contents of Paul's epistles can actually give rise to a wrong interpretation.<sup>26</sup>

In 3:16 the letters of Paul are compared with 'the other Scriptures'. Some scholars think that here we are not concerned with writings that have ecclesiastical authority. At that time the word γραφή would not have been a technical term since the expression also could be used in quotations from apocryphal books and unknown sources. According to this line of thought, the term γραφή only points to a compilation of religious writings.<sup>27</sup> However, in 2 Peter the plural αἱ γραφαί is used, the technical term for the collection of Israel's Holy Scriptures. The wisdom of Paul is comparable with that of the prophets who through the Holy Spirit 'were carried along' (1:20-21). Therefore Paul's letters are on a level with the authoritative books of the Tanakh. These apostolic letters apparently carried so much authority in the church that certain people took pains to twist their meaning.

This argument does not mean to say that Peter and his readers had a complete edition of Paul's collected works at their disposal. The text limits its focus to what Paul wrote to the readers of 2 Peter (ἔγραψεν ὑμῖν), who lived in Asia Minor. As far as his aim with his reference to Paul is concerned, Peter probably did not link Paul's writings to just the last words of 3:15a about God's patience but to all of what Peter wrote in 3:14-15a. That passage deals with a holy life in view of the expectation of God's kingdom. These considerations make us think especially of Paul's letter to the Galatians. It is also possible to think of the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians – the latter is indeed difficult to interpret.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, all of Paul's letters have an eschatological aspect. Giving due respect to Paul, Peter can refer to his brother, reinforcing his wisdom.



During the process of collecting Paul's letters, especially two internal factors would have played a role. Firstly, the apostolic writings were not private property. Submitting oneself to the ambassadors of Christ generally implied acceptance of the prevailing authority of their letters (2 Cor 13:3). Secondly, the apostolic letters were not written just for certain occasions. Believers immediately observed and acknowledged the divine wisdom of Paul's words (1 Thess 2:13). At an early stage, they likely would already have kept, collected and bundled his epistles. That process would have started with the individual congregations. In some cases, the apostle even gave instructions on how they had to (publicly) read his letter in the congregation and to share it with other congregations (Col 4:16; 1 Thess 5:27). Ellis infers, 'The reference to "all Paul's letters" as "Scripture" in II Peter 3:16 is no sign of a post-apostolic date since Paul himself regards them as the "commandment of the Lord" and as on par with canonical Scripture, i.e. the Old Testament.'<sup>29</sup>

### 5. The affinity between 2 Peter and Jude is so close, that many often assume the writer of 2 Peter knew and used the letter of Jude.

In his report on the CBL (= Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense) 2003 Conference Seminar, Thurén gives the impression that the classic problem of the relation between 2 Peter and Jude is almost solved. These specialists on the Catholic Epistles more or less unequivocally assessed Jude as the prior document. Though some members of the seminar group wanted to leave the door open to the hypothesis of a common source, they did not do so with much enthusiasm.<sup>30</sup> Because of the modern consensus about the priority of Jude, some commentaries deal with Jude before 2 Peter, deviating from the canonical order.<sup>31</sup>

Kahmann enumerates the most salient arguments in favour of the priority of Jude. First of all he observes that the resemblances form a close unity in Jude while in 2 Peter they are scattered over three chapters. In the second place Jude does not speak about Christ's return while Peter does. This difference points to a later stage in the development of early Christianity. In the third place, 2 Peter 2 lists the examples from history in chronological order but it does not have the examples from the apocryphal books.<sup>32</sup>

A closer look at this reasoning proves it to be

faulty. If one, for instance, tries to reverse the order, this can be done in the following manner. In the first place, Jude may have compiled the scattered material from 2 Peter, making it into a compact unity. In the second place, Jude may have ignored the eschatological elements from 2 Peter, since at a later time the delay of Christ's return was felt less as a problem than was the case at the beginning of early Christianity. In the third place, Jude can have added all sorts of examples from the Jewish tradition to what Peter had written, since that would have been appealing to Jude's particular addressees.<sup>33</sup> Therefore the priority of 2 Peter also finds supporters.<sup>34</sup>

A clear link between 2 Peter and Jude is the apostolic warning against the coming of 'scoffers' (2 Pet 3:2-4; Jude 17-18; the Greek word ἐμπαῖκται only occurs in these two places in the New Testament). When Jude reminds his readers of the words of the apostles (a circle of leaders within which he apparently does not include himself), he merely gives a literal quote in the wording of the second letter of the apostle Peter. 'In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their ungodly desires' (Jude 18). Besides, he adds his own explanation to this quote. While the apostles had warned against people who would follow their *own* desires, Jude's judgment is that those desires are *ungodly* desires. Ungodliness evidently is an important theme in the letter of Jude.<sup>35</sup> Jude's epistle, then, might be the earliest witness for the authenticity of 2 Peter.

All the same, it remains remarkable that there is no literal resemblance whatsoever between 2 Peter and Jude except on the point of that apostolic warning. Both have chosen several examples from history. Similar examples are developed independently and the accents are placed on different matters. Consequently, Jude can neither be a copy nor a summary of 2 Peter. Therefore, the most satisfactory explanation is that both letters have a common source and at the same time it can be stated that Jude gives a quote from 2 Peter.

The possibility that this source would have been a prophetic treatise or an apostolic polemic against heretics is highly unlikely since no such material has been preserved.<sup>36</sup> It is more acceptable to think of an oral source, as Reicke has demonstrated.<sup>37</sup> 2 Peter and Jude both originate from a common tradition of the apostolic proclamation with fixed elements. Those fixed elements functioned as reminders and warnings, with a series of examples from history at hand for illustration.<sup>38</sup>



## 6. The book is written in a polished style, using many words not found elsewhere in the New Testament.

When reading 2 Peter in Greek, one will soon encounter its complexity. Unusual style, syntax and vocabulary are used.<sup>39</sup> Kraus, for instance, counted 56 *hapaxes* in this letter. Half of them do not occur in the Septuagint either. Half of the remainder of these words are unknown in Jewish literature. Three words are not found in any other Greek text at all.<sup>40</sup> Because of the method of stylistic refinement, 2 Peter has been classified as an example of Asian rhetoric (in contrast to Attic rhetoric). This style has also been characterized as grand Asian. It is a style that is comparable to the literature of the Baroque period in Europe. Indeed, it would have been possible to write in this style anywhere, even in Rome, by imitating writers like Demosthenes and Cicero.<sup>41</sup>

So, the style of 2 Peter does not need to be labelled as bombastic. It does not need to be denigrated at all. Writing in a refined and dignified way, the author consciously shows that he is making his spiritual testament. He writes in this distinguished style with the aim of stimulating his readers to strive for growth in doing good, so that they will be ready for the new heavens and the new earth to come (3:13-14).

2 Peter's stylistic discrepancy with 1 Peter is usually taken as an insurmountable objection against the authenticity of 2 Peter. However, Kenny clearly shows how difficult it is to determine a difference in style with absolute standards.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, the question can be asked, Are the differences really so significant as to exclude common authorship?

A popular solution used to be the secretary hypothesis, according to which Silas or Silvanus influenced the style of 1 Peter. Peter mentions his name at the end of the letter: 'With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly' (1 Pet 5:12). However, Richards has convincingly demonstrated that this solution is not tenable. The Greek expression 'by means of Silas I have written' (διὰ Σιλουανοῦ ... ἔγραψα) means that Silas was the carrier of this circular letter to the regions mentioned in the heading.<sup>43</sup> He had done the same with the letter from the Jerusalem council: Silas delivered this circular letter and explained its contents with regard to the concrete situation of the congregations (Acts 15:22-35). He may have done the same with Peter's epistle. It is striking that Peter stresses the trustworthiness of Silas, not

in regard to Peter himself but in regard to his readers: 'for you the trustworthy brother', as the beginning of verse 12 should be translated (ὁμῖν τοῦ πιστοῦ ἀδελφοῦ).

Let me suggest a better way of explaining the differences in style between 1 and 2 Peter. They can be linked to a difference in time and place between 1 and 2 Peter. In my opinion, the first epistle was not written from Rome. Hunzinger has convincingly demonstrated that Rome was not characterized as 'Babylon' (1 Pet 5:13) before the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. True, Hunzinger concluded that Peter could not be the author of 1 Peter,<sup>44</sup> yet it is rather the other way round: 1 Peter was not written from Rome. Three arguments will make this clear:

1. Unlike the apocalyptic Book of Revelation, 1 Peter does not work with veiled allusions to the destructive power of the Roman Empire. On the contrary, the magistrates deserve all respect from Christians (1 Pet 2:11-17).
2. At the end of his epistle, the writer mentions a place of origin in an inconspicuous way, sending greetings from where he lives (just like Paul does in 1 Cor 16:19: 'The churches in Asia send you greetings'). Why would he have chosen a cipher right at that moment?
3. The use of the name Babylon has the side effect of evoking associations with the Babylonian exile of Israel. The readers of 1 Peter would relate to the exile motif, since they were addressed in the opening of the letter as elect exiles in the Diaspora.

I suggest that the apostle Peter wrote his first letter from the geographical Babylon, in Mesopotamia, the territory around the old city on the Euphrates, where the Jews formed a politically and numerically important group. Peter can have spent some time in Babylon as an exile.<sup>45</sup> At the end of his life, perhaps ten years after his first letter, he wrote his second letter from within the Hellenistic culture of Rome.<sup>46</sup> There, Peter would have had the opportunity to improve his Greek, as Flavius Josephus did. Both men were already Greek speakers (as their second language), but they probably had not read any classical Greek authors before moving to Rome.<sup>47</sup> Josephus tells us that after having gained knowledge of Greek grammar, he laboured strenuously to get a good command of Greek prose and poetry. His own Jewish people, he adds, did not favour those persons who refined their style with smoothness of diction.<sup>48</sup> This information reminds us of the refined and elegant style of 2 Peter. It



is well possible that Peter, just like Josephus, had made such a way of writing his own while he stayed in Rome.

**7. In chapter 3 the author reminds his readers of the gravity of Jesus' promise that he will soon come. He wants to remove any doubt they might have about his coming.**

Fornberg describes the hypothetical situation of 2 Peter 3 as follows:

The adversaries lived in the church. The belief in a more or less imminent Second Coming was part of the Christian tradition. In a world that was to a great extent characterized by a deterministic view of the universe, it was often difficult to persevere in expectation of the Parousia. The death of the first generation of Christians was for many a reason to re-interpret, or possibly reject, Christian eschatology.<sup>49</sup>

Most commentators hold this view. They usually understand the question posed by scoffers, 'Where is this "coming" he promised?' (3:4), as an expression of disappointment concerning the Second Coming. Jesus announced that he would return soon but he had not come yet. As the scoffers grew increasingly impatient, they were taken as people who critically questioned the promise of Jesus' return. This would indicate a relatively late stage in the development of the early church.

However, it is striking that the scoffers speak biblical language, using words like promise, coming, falling asleep, creation. These words bring me to the observation that the scoffers called the old promise of the coming of YHWH into question. So, here we are concerned with the promise made by the Old Testament prophets and not with Christ's promise to come again. The only promise expressly mentioned in the context of 2 Peter 3 is the one by Isaiah about the new heavens and a new earth (verse 13, referring to Isa 65:17; 66:22). The fathers are thus the people who received the promise. In first century literature, the expression 'the fathers' refers almost without exception to the Old Testament forefathers.<sup>50</sup> The scoffers lived according to their own lusts, not as a result of some sort of Christian generation gap but because they assumed that God would never intervene in the history of mankind. However, such thinking contradicted God's announced judgment over sinners.

Peter wanted to warn his readers of this misconception. Just as the first world had been wiped away by the Flood, bringing God's judgment over ungodly men, so the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire. That is the 'day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men', as 2 Peter puts it (3:7). This warning is no evidence for a late date of the letter. This warning is applicable for readers of all times. However, God's final judgment does not mean the definite end of his creation work. Through his judgment, God will bring about a new world according to his old promise: 'But in keeping with his promise we look forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness' (3:13).

## Conclusion

The result of my research as presented in my dissertation can be formulated as follows: *2 Peter is an authentic epistle of which the apostle Peter is the author.* As I have attempted to show, the objections that have been raised against the authenticity of the epistle are understandable but not insurmountable. The claim of the text itself, to be written by Συμεὼν Πέτρος (1:1), can be accepted without objection. At several points the epistle shows that the writer is an apostle. He presents himself as an eye and ear witness (1:16-19). He stands on a level with the prophets. He is in the service of Christ (3:2). He defends the Scripture against private interpretations and against twisting its words (1:20-21; 3:16). And more than once he warns against error (2:1-22; 3:3-7).

As far as its content is concerned, this Petrine epistle forms a unity. It reveals a triangular relationship between Christology (Chapter 1), ethics (Chapter 2) and eschatology (Chapter 3). The knowledge of Jesus Christ is of prime significance. Anybody who knows him wants to live as a faithful Christian in the expectation of God's promises. Thus Christology sets the tone in Peter's second epistle. Peter blows his second trumpet especially in praise to Christ's majesty!

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## Notes

- 1 P.H.R. van Houwelingen, *De tweede trompet. De authenticiteit van de tweede brief van Petrus* (Kampen:



- Kok, 1988). The supervisor of this Kampen dissertation was Jakob van Bruggen. The statement of Origen can be found in *Homiliae in Librum Jesu Nave* VII 1 (PL 12,857): 'Petrus etiam duabus Epistolarum suarum personat tubis.' Although we have only the Latin translation of the homily, both the order of the biblical writers (with Peter immediately after the four evangelists) and the typical allegorical explanation indicate that this passage originated with Origen himself. His opinion about 2 Peter can be traced back to Clement of Alexandria, if Eusebius was correct in remarking that Clement gave explanations of all canonical Scriptures including the Epistle of Jude and the remaining Catholic Epistles (*Hist. Eccl.* VI 14,1). Anyway, the canonical reception of 2 Peter has to be considered as an integral part of the collection of the seven Catholic Epistles. Thought-provoking in this respect is the canonical approach to the Catholic Epistles by Jacques Schlosser, 'Le corpus des Épîtres catholiques,' in J. Schlosser (ed.), *The Catholic Epistles and the Tradition* (Leuven: University Press/Peeters, 2004) 3-41. See also footnote 18 below.
- 2 Originally, this material was presented as a paper at the Tyndale Fellowship Conference 'Perspectives on Peter' (Cambridge, July 7-9, 2008).
  - 3 See also Michael J. Kruger, 'The Authenticity of 2 Peter,' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42.4 (1999) 645-671; Michael J. Gilmour, 'Reflections on the Authorship of 2 Peter,' *Evangelical Quarterly* 73.4 (2001) 291-309.
  - 4 Jerome H. Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude* (Anchor Bible; New York: Doubleday, 1993) 147.
  - 5 Eric Fuchs/Pierre Reymond, *La deuxième Épître de Saint Pierre; L'Épître de Saint Jude* (Commentaire du Nouveau Testament; Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1980) 44. This interpretation has a long-standing tradition. See Gerald Bray (ed.), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. New Testament XI: James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000) 130.
  - 6 Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida (eds.), *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains. Volume 1* (Cape Town: Bible Society of South Africa, 1989) 589.
  - 7 Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude* (New American Commentary; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003) 368-370.
  - 8 P.H.R. van Houwelingen, *2 Petrus en Judas. Testament in tweevoud* (Commentaar op het Nieuwe Testament; Kampen: Kok, 1993) 77.
  - 9 This eyewitness report of the transfiguration differs in three points from the synoptic Gospels. As to the literary form, many details are left out from the body of the report. This shows that the people knew about the event of the transfiguration. The location 'on the holy mountain' does not refer to a later time, when the mountain of glorification was supposed to have received a sacred character, but it points to the company Jesus kept with his apostles, by which he had chosen a special mountain as their meeting place. The words from heaven are retrospectively reproduced without the call 'Listen to him!' (Mark 9:7), because this order was already put into practice by the apostles. The statement 'with him I am well pleased' only occurs in Matthew (17:5: ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα); 2 Peter has a different formulation (εἰς ὃν ἐγὼ εὐδόκησα). These three points together plead in favour of the authenticity of the eyewitness report in the verses 16-18.
  - 10 E. Earle Ellis, *The Making of the New Testament Documents* (Leiden: Brill, 1999) 298.
  - 11 In the ecclesiastical tradition the theme of 'calling to remembrance' plays a prominent role in connection with Mark's gospel, in which Peter's memories are said to be contained. According to the tradition, Mark was the interpreter of Peter. That the apostle himself took care of this record could perhaps be concluded from 2 Peter 1:15, which was already understood as referring to the Gospel of Mark by Irenaeus (*Haer.* III 1,1). See for the Petrinic perspective in the Gospel of Mark P.H.R. van Houwelingen, 'Het ontstaan van het evangelie naar Marcus,' in A.G. Knevel et al. (eds.), *Verkenningen in de evangeliën* (Kampen: Kok Voorhoeve, 1990) 60-68; Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses. The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006) chapter 7.
  - 12 Werner Georg Kümmel, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (17. Auflage; Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1973) 379: 'Aber diesen Brief kann Petrus nicht geschrieben haben.' [English translation: *Introduction to the New Testament* (rev. ed.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1975) 302].
  - 13 Wolfgang Speyer, *Die literarische Fälschung im heidnischen und christlichen Altertum. Ein Versuch ihrer Deutung* (München: Beck, 1971). According to Speyer, in antiquity it was a legitimate literary form when a student published under the name of his teacher. Nonetheless, something like copyright existed too. A literary work was considered as the author's property and also as the product of his mind.
  - 14 David G. Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986) 193.
  - 15 Armin Daniel Baum, *Pseudepigraphie und literarische Fälschung im frühen Christentum* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004) 76-79.
  - 16 Hermann Josef Riedl, *Anamnese und Apostolizität. Der zweite Petrusbrief und das theologische Problem neutestamentlicher Pseudepigraphie* (Frankfurt: Lang, 2005) 229. Cf. Martin G. Ruf, *Die heiligen Propheten, eure Apostel und ich. Metatextuelle Studien zum zweiten Petrusbrief* (diss. Utrecht 2010).
  - 17 Terence V. Smith, *Petrine Controversies in Early Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1985) 100-101.



- 18 In the ecclesiastical tradition there was some uncertainty whether the apostle Peter himself was the author of 2 Peter. This uncertainty increased when more pseudepigraphic literature was attached to Peter's name. Therefore the question of who wrote 2 Peter was approached with great caution. Absolute value was attached to the originality and the apostolic character of the epistles from the New Testament. Both Origen and Eusebius, who themselves had no difficulty with Peter's authorship of 2 Peter, nevertheless mentioned doubts that existed about this issue. However, familiarity with this epistle can be ascertained from the second century, especially in Egypt and Asia Minor. Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus and Justin Martyr not only give evidence of having read and used 2 Peter themselves, but their starting point was that others also knew the epistle. The uncertainty particularly concerned the authorship but the certainty that 2 Peter is among 'the Scriptures' pervades the ecclesiastical testimony during the first four centuries. Moreover, in the early literature about Peter, 2 Peter was an authoritative part of the apostolic legacy; the epistle was used as a model to first portray and then to expose false teachers (*Apocalypse of Peter*, *Acts of Peter*). Hence, Lapham thinks that he has discovered a Petrine tradition: F. Lapham, *Peter: The Myth, the Man and the Writings. A Study of Early Petrine Text and Tradition* (Sheffield: Academic Press, 2003). See for a full discussion of the relevant data Van Houwelingen, *De tweede trompet*, 21-35 and 45-48; Kruger, 'Authenticity', 649-656.
- 19 Baum, *Pseudepigraphie*, 99-112. Kruger also lists the most important examples ('Authenticity' 646-649). These examples are taken from *The Acts of Paul*, *The Gospel of Peter* and from a censure of forged letters of Paul in the Muratorian Fragment.
- 20 D.A. Carson & Douglas J. Moo, *Introduction in the New Testament* (Second ed.; Leicester: Apollos, 2005) 342. As a matter of fact, despite his detailed research, Schmidt was able to present no decisive but only tentative evidence for a transparent fictional reading of both 1 and 2 Peter (Karl Matthias Schmidt, *Mahnung und Erinnerung im Maskenspiel. Epistolographie, Rhetorik und Narrativik der pseudepigraphen Petrusbriefe* (Freiburg: Herder, 2003)).
- 21 Terry L. Wilder, *Pseudonimity, the New Testament, and Deception. An Inquiry into Intention and Reception* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2004). See also E. Earle Ellis, *History and Interpretation in New Testament Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2001) 17-29 [=Chapter II: Pseudonimity and Canonicity of New Testament Documents].
- 22 Stanley E. Porter has suggested to delete the Pastoral Letters from the New Testament canon ('Pauline Authorship and the Pastoral Epistles: a Response to R.W. Wall's Response', *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 6 (1996) 133-138). Ellis finds the reason to consider 2 Peter as a later fiction or forgery so impressive that, at first glance, he 'was prepared, if need be, to live with a 26-book New Testament canon' (*New Testament Documents* 293-294 with footnote 306).
- 23 Carson & Moo, *Introduction*, 663. See for a canonical approach Ruth Anne Reese, *2 Peter & Jude* (Two Horizons New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).
- 24 J.A. Fitzmyer, 'The name Simon', in his *Essays on the Semitic Background of the New Testament* (London: Chapman, 1971) 105-112. Cf. Tal Ilan, *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity. Part I: Palestine 330 BCE-200 CE* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002) 218-235.
- 25 G. de Ru, "De authenticiteit van II Petrus," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 24 (1969) 2-12.
- 26 The text simply speaks about 'our dear brother Paul'. This way of referring to him could make one think of the time after the apostolic period when Paul had died. As Neyrey puts it: 'It is best, then, to read 3:15-16 in terms of a harmonizing tendency which is calculated to present the impression of a fixed tradition of early Christian theology' (2 Peter, Jude 250). However, these words are more an indication of how the apostles actually worked as colleagues in the preaching of the Gospel (the first person plural is used; 'our brother' points to the circle of apostles). The disagreement between the two colleagues in Antioch was not a definitive split, only an incident which did not essentially affect the relationship between them as brothers (Gal 2:6-10). With a view to the readers in Asia Minor, Peter can appeal to the joint authority of both apostles in the church.
- 27 Tord Fornberg, *An Early Church in a Pluralistic Society. A Study of 2 Peter* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1977) 22-23; Anton Vögtle, 'Petrus und Paulus nach dem zweiten Petrusbrief', in *Offenbarungsgeschehen und Wirkungsgeschichte* (Freiburg: Herder, 1985) 280-296; Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter* (Word Biblical Commentary; Waco: Word, 1983) 333.
- 28 Van Houwelingen, *De tweede trompet*, 268-270; idem, *2 Petrus en Judas*, 99-100. At the end of his letter to the Galatians, Paul emphatically warns against the abuse of Christian freedom, for whoever lives according to his sinful nature will not enter the kingdom of God. But he who in Christ is a new creation will experience the growth of the manifold fruit of the Spirit and will receive the peace of the kingdom that is coming (Gal 5:13-6:16; see also Eph 1:4; 5:27; Col 1:22).
- 29 Ellis, *New Testament Documents* 296-297. Because Paul's directions laid claim to being received as authoritative in the congregations, his letters were of more than local or regional importance. That is why Ignatius later wrote to the Ephesians that Paul had them in view in every letter (Ign. Eph. 12,2).
- 30 Lauri Thurén, 'The Relationship between 2 Peter



- and Jude – A Classical problem Resolved?', in Schlosser, *Catholic Epistles*, 451-460. See also Duane Frederick Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style: Rhetorical Criticism of Jude and 2 Peter* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988); Michael J. Gilmour, *The Significance of Parallels between 2 Peter and Other Early Christian Literature* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002).
- 31 So, for instance, Walter Grundmann, *Der Brief des Judas und der zweite Brief des Petrus* (Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament; third edn; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1986); Anton Vögtle, *Der Judasbrief/ Der zweite Petrusbrief* (Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1994); Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*. The order of the actual discussion is sometimes contrary to the title of the commentary: Henning Paulsen, *Der Zweite Petrusbrief und der Judasbrief* (Meyers Kritisch-Exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992); Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude*; Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude* (The Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006). This is even the case with Reese, *2 Peter & Jude*, despite her canonical approach.
  - 32 J.J.A. Kahmann, 'The Second Letter of Peter and the Letter of Jude: Their Mutual Relationship', in J.-M. Sevrin (ed.), *The New Testament in Early Christianity* (Leuven: Peeters, 1989) 105-212.
  - 33 Van Houwelingen, *2 Petrus en Judas*, 17-22; Carson & Moo, *Introduction*, 655-657. Scholars generally believe that the readers of Jude are Christian Jews (in contrast to those of 2 Peter; see J. Daryl Charles, *Virtue amidst Vice* (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1997)), since the author assumes familiarity with the Old Testament as well as with Jewish traditions and he presents himself as the brother of James. Contra Anders Gerdmar, *Rethinking the Judaism-Hellenism Dichotomy. A Historiographical Case Study of Second Peter and Jude* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2001).
  - 34 So, for instance, Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude* (International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1902) 216-224; G. Wohlenberg, *Der erste und zweite Petrusbrief und der Judasbrief* (Kommentar zum Neuen Testament; third edn; Leipzig/Erlangen: Deichert, 1923) xli-xliv; Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 415-419.
  - 35 Although for reasons understandable yet to be rejected, the words in Jude 18 τῶν ἁσέβειων are sometimes taken as a gloss. Such a gloss, however, would have fitted much better at the end of verse 16. Contra J. de Zwaan, *II Petrus en Judas* (Leiden: Van Doesburgh, 1909) 145.
  - 36 Contra E.I. Robson, *Studies in the Second Epistle of St. Peter* (Cambridge: University Press, 1915) 52; C. Spicq, *Les Épitres de Saint Pierre* (Sources Bibliques; Paris: Gabalda, 1966) 197; Michael Green, *The Second Epistle General of Peter and the General Epistle of Jude. Revised Edition* (Tyndale NTC; Leicester: IVP, 1987) 58-64.
  - 37 'The best assumption is that both epistles derive from a common tradition which may have been oral rather than written. Very possibly there was a sermon pattern formulated to resist the seducers of the church; this would explain both the similarities and the differences in a satisfactory fashion'. Bo Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude* (Anchor Bible; New York, Doubleday, 1964) 190. According to Reicke, a similar tradition forms the basis of the synoptic gospels: Bo Reicke, *The Roots of the Synoptic Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968).
  - 38 Van Houwelingen, *De tweede trompet*, 43-45. Peter represents this tradition as the disciple and apostle of Jesus Christ, and Jude as the brother of James, the brother of the Lord. The apostolic warnings against false teachers can be traced back to the teachings of Jesus Christ (Mat 7:15-23; 24:23-28). Dependent on the circumstances these warnings were specifically applied to the concrete situation (Acts 20:29-30; 1 Tim 4:1-3; 2 Tim 3:1-9; 1 John 2:18).
  - 39 Lauri Thurén, 'Style Never Goes out of Fashion: 2 Peter Re-Evaluated', in S.E. Porter and T.H. Olbricht (eds.), *Rhetoric, Scripture and Theology. Essays from the 1994 Pretoria Conference* (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1996) 329-347; Thomas J. Kraus, *Sprache, Stil und historischer Ort des zweiten Petrusbriefes* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001); Terrance Callan, 'The Style of the Second Letter of Peter', *Biblica* 84 (2003) 202-224.
  - 40 The three unique words that 2 Peter provides are ἐμπαιγμονή, μυωπάζειν, παραφρονία (Kraus, *Sprache, Stil und historischer Ort*, 318-360).
  - 41 Callan, 'Style', 223-224. He notes the similarities between 2 Peter and the Nemrud-Dagh inscription from Commagene in Northern Syria, which is considered to be typical of the grand Asian style. According to Callan, this may imply that 2 Peter was not written in Rome, but rather somewhere like Commagene.
  - 42 Anthony Kenny, *A Stylometric Study of the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).
  - 43 E. Randolph Richards, 'Silvanus was not Peter's secretary: Theological bias in interpreting διὰ Σιλοvanou ... ἔγραψα in 1 Peter 5:12', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43.3 (2000) 417-432.
  - 44 Claus-Hunno Hunzinger, 'Babylon als Deckname für Rom und die Datierung des 1. Petrusbriefes', in H. Graf Reventlov (ed.), *Gottes Wort und Gottes Land*. FS H.-W. Hertzberg (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965) 67-77.
  - 45 Van Houwelingen, *De tweede trompet*, 57-62. According to Strabo (*Geography* XVI 1,5) and Pliny (*Natural History* VI 121-123) the city itself was



- largely deserted, but Babylon can indicate both the city and the land of Babel. The reference to Babel is also intended to connect the writer and the readers in their situation of exile (Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996) 354; Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter* (Baker Exegetical Commentary; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005) 323). See also P.H.R. van Houwelingen, *1 Petrus. Rondzendbrief uit Babylon* (Commentaar op het Nieuwe Testament; Kampen: Kok, 1991) 26-27 and 190. Calvin and Bengel had the same opinion. From the Babylonian Talmud we know that for ages after the Babylonian exile, an influential Jewish community existed in Mesopotamia. In Acts 2:9, Jews from Mesopotamia are mentioned among the audience of Peter at Pentecost in Jerusalem. According to Acts 12:17, after his wonderful release from prison, Peter 'left for another place', which is not to be identified as Rome, because Herod Agrippa (who had good contacts with the Roman authorities) could arrest him there as well as in Jerusalem. If the other place was Babylon in Mesopotamia, then Peter found himself outside of the Roman Empire. He lived on the other side of the border, in a territory belonging to the kingdom of the Parthians.
- 46 This could provide an explanation for a remarkable stylistic paradox in 2 Peter: the existence of Hellenisms and Semitisms alongside each other, which Kahmann pointedly typified as a symbiosis of two cultures: J.J.A. Kahmann / B. Dehandschutter, *De tweede brief van Petrus; de brief van Judas* (Het Nieuwe Testament vertaald en toegelicht; Boxtel: Katholieke Bijbelstichting, 1983) 12. According to Kahmann, the letter would have been written by a Christian author of Jewish-Hellenistic descent.
- 47 *Ant.* 20,263-264 (comp. 1,7 and *Against Apion* 1,50). See for the Greek language of Josephus Tessa Rajak, *Josephus. The Historian and His Society* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 46-64.
- 48 Rajak makes clear that Josephus did write his own works with the help of friends or acquaintances, to whom he sent or showed parts of his work during the different stages in its composition. Therefore, she refutes Thackeray's stylistic assistant theory (Rajak, *Josephus*, 63 and 233-236 = Appendix 2).
- 49 Fornberg, *Early Church*, 61-65.
- 50 John 6:31; 7:22; Acts 3:13; 13:32; Rom 9:5; Heb 1:1. For a more detailed discussion see Van Houwelingen, *De tweede trompet*, 223-228. With respect to the common interpretation, Bigg remarked: 'But no forger would have fallen into so obvious and fatal a blunder' (*Commentary* 291). See E.M.B. Green, 'Der 2. Petrusbrief neu betrachtet', in C.P. Thiede (ed.), *Das Petrusbild in den neueren Forschung* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1987) 1-50, esp. 32; Simon J. Kistemaker, *Peter and Jude* (New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) 326; Ellis, *New Testament Documents* 295-296; Schreiner, *1,2 Peter, Jude*, 373-374.