Rule of Faith and Ground of Hope:

Canon Definition and

Encouragement in 2 Peter 3

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"Embracing the testimony of the gospel concerning freely given love, we look for the time when God will openly show that which is now hidden under hope."[1] In other words, the ancient Scriptures presently nourish the believers' expectation of a glorious future. This is a "well-grounded hope, therefore good hope, built on the promise and word of the eternal God."[2] The foundation thereof is the very faithfulness of God, who made the promises[3] and caused them to be recorded in written form.[4]

According to Calvin, "Moses and the prophets did not utter at random what we have received from their hand, but, speaking at the suggestion of God, they boldly and fearlessly testified, what was actually true, that it was the mouth of the Lord that spake."[5] And thus, "we owe to Scripture the same reverence which we owe to God; because it has proceeded from him alone."[6] The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* teaches that "the word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him."[7] From this perspective, Scriptures must be the ultimate authority not only in matters of faith and religion, but also in the full scope of man's life before the face of God.

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1. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 3.2.43.

2. Thomas Manton, "Eighteen Sermons on the Second Chapter of the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians," in Thomas Smith, ed., *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton*, vol. 3 (London: James Nisbet, 1871), 158.

3. Heb. 10:23 NKJV.

4. 2 Pet. 1:21 NKJV.

5. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, s.d.).

6. *Ibid*.

7. "The Westminster Shorter Catechism," in *The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America* (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant, 2021), C-1.

Seeing that Scriptures are a rule for faith and life, it is the believers' duty to learn how to correctly identify and interpret the canonical books of the Bible. A sound doctrine of canonics is vital for the believer's orthodoxy and piety. The New Testament church has never been without a canon, since Jesus and the apostles acknowledged and adopted the Old Testament as their Scriptures. Then, guided by the Spirit, the apostles gradually annexed a new collection of authoritative writings to the former Scriptures, which came to be known as the New Testament.[8]

Through the canon of the New Testament, the apostles instruct the church in matters concerning the life and ministry of Jesus, soteriology, the use of the law, church discipline, persecution, and false prophets. The apostles were aware of the authoritative character of their and their associates' writings,[9] and thus rightfully imposed them on the church.[10] However, distributing those Scriptures to every section of the church was notably difficult at that time, which fact, combined with the abundance of pseudo-apostolic writings, contributed to delaying the universal reception of some of the catholic epistles and even the Apocalypse.[11]

One of the most disputed canonical works has been Peter's Second Epistle, which was composed to warn the church against false teachers in their midst, as well as to encourage believers to persevere in faith and godliness. This research will defend, from the epistle's final chapter, that, anticipating the close of the apostolic age, Peter defines the trustworthy rule of faith and ground of hope for the militant church.

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8. Benjamin B. Warfield, "The Formation of the Canon of the New Testament," in Samuel G. Craig, ed., *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2020), 411–413.

9. cf. 1 Co. 14:37; 2 Thess. 3:14; 2 Pe. 3:15, 16; Rev. 21:5 NKJV.

10. Warfield, "The Formation of the Canon of the New Testament," 415.

11. *Ibid*.

"This Second Letter"

Although well attested and circulated as early as the Apostolic Fathers, it is not until the third century that we can find the first mention to the Second Epistle of Peter by name, in the writings of Origen, who accepted the epistle, despite admitting that its canonicity had been contested.[12] In fact, it was not until the fourth century that Second Peter gained more general acceptance, being recognized by important church Fathers and regional councils.[13]

Jerome expressed the problem of authorship suspicion in his days, on the basis of stylistic differences between First and Second Peter, proposing as a possible solution the use of different amanuenses in the composition of each.[14] In the latter, the inspired author adopts a much more grandiose tone and a grammar that has perplexed scholars, also employing some extremely rare vocabulary.[15] The two letters present notably contrasting word choices in reference to common key concepts, such as the ἀποκάλυψις in the former versus the παρουσία of the Lord in the latter.[16] Whereas First Peter quotes extensively from the Old Testament, mostly from the Septuagint, Second Peter only alludes thereto.[17]

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12. Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, in *The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh, UK: T & T Clark, 1961), 199–211.

13. E.M.B. Green, *2 Peter Reconsidered* (London: Tyndale, 1968), 5–7.

14. i.e., secretaries; cf. Jerome, "Lives of Illustrious Men," in Philip Schaff, ed., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, s.d.), ch. 1.

15. Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, vol. 50 in *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 135–137.

16. Gene L. Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, ebook ed., in *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, eds. Robert W. Yarbrough and Joshua W. Jipp (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013); comp. 1 Pe. 1:7, 13; 2 Pe. 1:16; 3:12 NKJV.

17. *Ibid*.

The text itself, however, is filled with bold claims of authorship, which are hard to dismiss without questioning the canonicity of the epistle. The author identifies himself as "Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ," an eyewitness of his majesty.[18] He appeals to the transfiguration experience "on the holy mountain,"[19] and refers to the prophecy of his death.[20] Moreover, the author calls it a "second epistle,"[21] the first most likely being First Peter, although commentators have also proposed the epistle of Jude or some other lost correspondence instead.[22] Scholars that object to petrine authorship point to the writer's insistence in proving his apostolic credentials by referring to personal experience that would be known to his audience. It should be noted, however, that none of the references to gospel narratives are mere repetitions, but they all read like a fresh retelling of the events, presented in a varied form.[23]

The Apostolic Fathers seem to have a high view of Second Peter, and interact with the epistle's teaching as an authoritative source. A portion of the Epistle of Barnabas reads, "for the day with Him signifieth a thousand years; and this He himself beareth witness, saying; *Behold, the day of the Lord shall be as a thousand years*. Therefore, children, in six days, that is in six thousand years, everything shall come to and end,"[24] a likely reference to the language and

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18. 2 Pe. 1:1, 16. NKJV.

19. 2 Pe. 1:18 NKJV.

20. 2 Pe. 1:13–15; cf. John 21:18, 19 NKJV.

21. 2 Pe. 3:1 NKJV.

22. Michael Green, *The Second Epistle General of Peter and the General Epistle of Jude: An Introduction and Commentary*, rev. ed., in *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, ed. Canon Leon Morris (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 134, 135.

23. G. Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*.

24. "The Epistle of Barnabas," in J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. J. R. Harmer (London: MacMillan, 1891), 15:4.

teaching found in 2 Peter 3:8. Even more clearly, Second Clement reads, "but ye know that the day of judgment cometh even now *as a burning oven, and the powers of the heavens shall melt*, and all the earth as lead melting on the fire, and then shall appear the secret and open works of men,"[25] combining imagery found in Mal. 4:1 and Isa. 34:4 with the judgment scene of 2 Peter 3:7–12, specially evidenced by the use of the unique expression ἡμέρα κρίσεως (2 Pet. 3:7) and the verb φανήσεται ("to appear," as above).[26] A close connection between Second Peter and the spurious Apocalypse of Peter has also been suggested, sometimes even the latter as a source for the epistle. Nevertheless, the style and content of the Apocalypse are diametrically different than those of the epistle — or of any other canonical document —, the former having stronger ties to graeco-roman mythology, rather.[27]

The most important intertextual relation, though, is that between Second Peter and Jude. The similarities between the epistles of Second Peter and Jude have perplexed generations of Bible scholars. And rightly so, considering that only five verses of the latter — i.e., 20% of the total verse count — can be considered clearly independent material, with no viable equivalent in the former. This unique intertextual feature has led scholarship to believe there must be some sort of literary connection between both documents, and to propose a few different hypotheses as to how one relates to the other.[28]

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25. "An Ancient Homily: By an Unknown Author," in Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 16:3.

26. Bigg rightly considers this the author's attempt to make sense of the corrupt εὑρεθήσεται, present in 2 Peter 3:10 in various ancient manuscripts (*St. Peter and St. Jude*, 209).

27. This point is well worked and demonstrated in Bigg, *St. Peter and St. Jude*, 207–209.

28. M. Green, *2 Peter and Jude*, 23, 24.

Some have contemplated the hypothesis of a common traditional source wherefrom both canonical works might have borrowed. In a similar approach to that of the Q-source theory for the synoptic gospels, such a tract could have been used in the early church to warn believers on how to identify and avoid false teachings. Nevertheless, a hypothetical lost source has been ruled out as unnecessary by most scholars.[29]

More surprising than the similarities between both epistles, however, are their differences. Despite the clear parallelism of ideas, each author employed his personal style and vocabulary in ways that best serve his distinct purposes. Although both share a similar warning, Peter encourages his audience to pursue the knowledge of the way of righteousness as found in Scriptures,[30] while Jude exhorts his readers to keep the holy faith by the Spirit.[31]

One major piece of evidence for petrine priority is found in the different approaches to apostolic prophecy by each author.[32] Peter includes himself under the label τῶν ἀποστόλων ἡμῶν "us the apostles," whereas Jude simply has τῶν ἀποστόλων "the apostles." Moreover, Jude uses the quotation formula ὅτι ἔλεγον ὑμῖν, where Peter appears to be simply introducing original teaching with τοῦτο πρῶτον γινώσκοντες, already used by him elsewhere.[33] Also, Jude adds his thematic word ἀσέβεια "ungodliness"[34] at the end of the sentence, thereby appropriating and applying the prophecy to his own emphasis and context.

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29. M. Green, *2 Peter and Jude*, 61–64.

30. e.g., 2 Pet. 2:21 NKJV.

31. cf. Jude 20 NKJV.

32. 2 Pet. 3:2, 3 // Jude 17, 18 NKJV.

33. 2 Pet. 1:20 NKJV.

34. Jude 18 NKJV.

Finally, in Jude 19, the author interprets the apostolic prophecy from Second Peter as referring to his own opponents. The description of the οὗτοί that is carefully built throughout the text[35] culminates in their identification as the objects of that prophecy. Second Peter, in future tense, paints the picture, but does not solve the riddle. Jude wanted his audience to understand soon that the warnings of Second Peter were real and present in their own circles.

Accepting the validity of the authorship claims and the intertextual relations presented above requires a sub-apostolic date of composition. The author claims to have sent a previous epistle[36] — probably First Peter —, to be familiar with the Pauline corpus,[37] and his death to be imminent.[38] Information concerning place of origin and destination, as well as the specific identity of the opponents, are not provided and difficult to deduce.[39] Thus, it is safe to place Second Peter within the mid-sixties of the first century.[40] Some scholars argue for a later date of composition based on the author's mention to the death of the πατέρες,[41] supposing the reference to mean the first generation of the church. Nevertheless, the context of the letter seems to prefer the old-testament fathers, abundantly alluded to in the second chapter; and the use of such language is well attested elsewhere in the New Testament.[42]

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35. cf. Jude 10, 11, 12, 16 NKJV.

36. 2 Pet. 3:1 NKJV.

37. 2 Pet. 3:15, 16 NKJV.

38. 2 Pet. 1:14 NKJV.

39. M. Green, *2 Peter and Jude*, 39, 40, 46.

40. *Ibid.*, 41, 42.

41. 2 Pet. 3:4 NKJV.

42. cf. Acts 3:13; Rom. 9:5; Heb. 1:1 NKJV.

The apostle wrote in the context of a growing New Testament canon, which he considered as true and authoritative as the Old.[43] He grounds his message on God's fulfilled judgments and deliverances in the Old Testament, encouraging his audience from the examples of "Noah, a preacher of righteousness,"[44] and "righteous Lot."[45] The apostle speaks of the authenticity of the gospel as witnessed by him, wherein his audience obtained the faith by the righteousness of Christ.[46] Furthermore, he announces with hope the παρουσία of the Lord, pointing ahead to the new heavens and new earth, wherein righteousness dwells.[47] He notes that the scoffers could not find solid ground for hope because they sought it in the fallen world, "all things continue as [they were] from the beginning of creation,"[48] whereas the godly looked forward to the new creation. The day of the Lord is presented as a dreadful thing for the ungodly, whereas the pious ought to look to it as their redemption.

> He further exhorts the faithful, not only to look always for the coming of Christ with suspended and expectant minds, but also to regard that day as present before theirs eyes, and in the meantime to keep themselves unpolluted for the Lord: in which doctrine he makes Paul as his associate and approver; and to defend his writings from the calumnies of the ungodly, he severely reproves all those who pervert them.[49]

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43. cf. 2 Pet. 1:19–21; 3:1, 2, 15, 16 NKJV.

44. 2 Pet. 2:5 NKJV.

45. 2 Pet. 2:6–8 NKJV.

46. 2 Pet. 1:1 NKJV.

47. 2 Pet. 3:13 NKJV.

48. 2 Pet. 3:4 NKJV.

49. John Calvin, "Commentary on Second Peter," in *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, ed. John Owen (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classic Ethereal Library, s.d).

Some of Peter's thematic words are δικαιοσύνη "righteousness,"[50] (ἐπι-)γνῶσις "knowledge,"[51] and ὑπόμνησις "remembrance,"[52] and thus his opponents are accused of ἀδικία "unrighteousness"[53] and λήθη "forgetfulness."[54] Throughout the epistle, the apostle warns his audience against false teachers, using an interesting progression of future, present, and perfect tenses to describe their activity and end.[55] The gradual transition from imperfect to perfect aspects in the second chapter may well be indicative of the author's certainty of prophecy fulfillment.

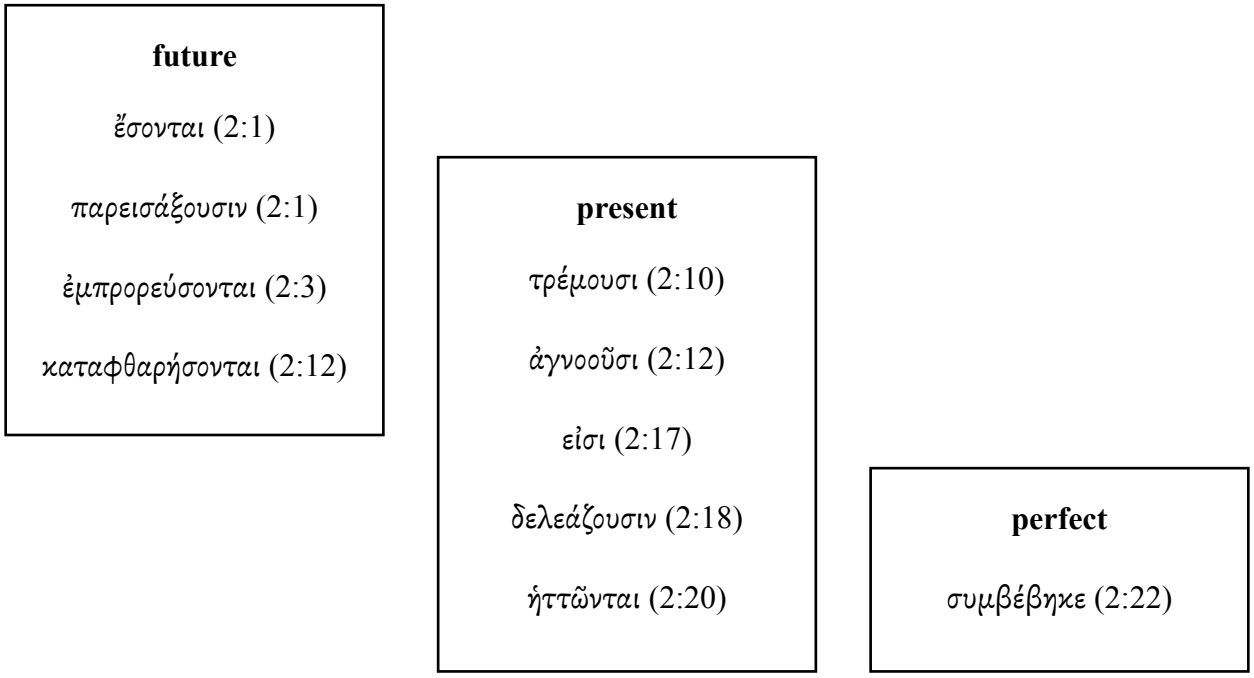


Figure 1. Progression of verb tenses in chapter 2.

50. cf. 2 Pet. 1:1; 2:5, 21; 3:13 NKJV.

51. cf. 2 Pet. 1:2, 3, 8; 2:20; 3:18 NKJV.

52. cf. 2 Pet. 1:13; 3:1 NKJV.

53. cf. 2 Pet. 2:5, 13, 15 NKJV.

54. cf. 2 Pet. 1:9; 3:5 NKJV.

55. comp. 2 Pet. 2:1, 18, 22 NKJV.

Second Peter follows the same usual structure as most New Testament epistles, consisting in a greeting, body, and doxology. The letter body can be divided in three parts as well.[56] Second Peter's greeting, however, is particularly long, including an extended prayer with exhortations. Note that the object of this study, that is, the third chapter, comprises the final portion of the letter body (II. C.) and the closing doxology (III.), thus building upon the theology of the whole document.

I. Epistolary greeting (1:1, 2)

A. Author (1:1)

B. Recipients (1:1)

C. Extended prayer (1:3–11)

II. Body (1:12 – 3:17)

A. The apostolic testimony (1:12–21)

B. The false teachers (ch. 2)

C. Exhortations (3:1–17)

III. Doxology (3:18)

Figure 2. Outline of Second Peter.

In the third chapter, the apostle addresses his readers using the vocative ἀγαπητοί "beloved,"[57] an unique feature of that section of the epistle. There also, the author uses key thematic verbs to establish contrasts between the ungodly and the beloved. In verse 5, the

56. G. Green, "Introduction to 2 Peter," in *Jude and 2 Peter*.

57. 2 Pet. 3:1, 8, 14, 17 NKJV.

scoffers neglect (λανθάνειν) revelational truth, whereas the beloved are urged not to neglect it in verse 8. In verse 9, some consider (ἡγεῖσθαι) the Lord to be slack, whereas in verse 15 the beloved consider him long-suffering. In verse 12, the day of the Lord is to be hasted (σπεύδειν), while in verse 14 the same verb is used to signify pursuing personal godliness. Thus, in that chapter, the apostle focuses on the concepts of remembrance, Scriptures, and future hope.

a *[Re-]statement of purpose and exhortation* (3:1, 2)
"Now, beloved, I write this second letter to you, . . ."
". . . that you may be mindful of the words. . ."

b *Judgment by water: the mockers' neglect and false security* (3:3–9)
". . . in the last days, there shall come mockers, . . ."
". . . where is the promise of his coming? . . . all things remain as were. . ."
". . . they willfully neglect. . . flooded by water, . . ."
". . . the present heavens and earth. . . destruction of impious men."
". . . do not neglect this one thing, beloved . . ."
". . . long-suffering toward us, . . . attain unto repentance."

b' *Judgment by fire: the beloved's diligence and promised hope* (3:10–15)
"But the day of the Lord shall come as a thief in the night; . . ."
"All those things being undone, how then ought you to proceed. . . ?"
"expecting and hastening. . . burning, shall melt."
". . . new heavens and new earth, wherein righteousness dwells."
". . . beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent. . ."
". . . the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation. . ."

a' *Inter-apostolic reference and validation* (3:15, 16)
". . . as also our beloved brother Paul. . . has written to you, . . . in all his letters, . . ."
". . . as also the rest of the Scriptures."

***** *Final exhortation and doxology* (3:17, 18)

Figure 3: Outline of chapter 3.

"That You May Be Mindful"

[3:1] *Now, beloved, I write this second letter to you,*
in both of which I rouse your sincere minds to remembrance,

After a long section describing the false prophets' activity and their end, the author transitions into the exhortation section of the epistle, in a loving and hopeful pastoral tone, by restating the purpose of his letter, referring back to 2 Peter 1:12–15. Which document he calls his first letter may be impossible to ascertain, even if one accepts petrine authorship, but the most natural assumption would be the canonic First Epistle of Peter, wherein the author exhorts his readers to "gird up the loins of [their] mind."[58]

[3:2] *that you may be mindful of the words predicted by the holy prophets*
and the commandment of the apostles ourselves, of the Lord and Savior;

Peter's exhortation in this verse centers around the verbal form μνησθῆναι "to remember, to be mindful of." The significance of this verb in context is infinitely superior to a mere recollection of facts. The use of this verb is strongly tied to Old Testament covenantal language. This verb is frequently used in the Septuagint to translate the root זכר "to remember." It is used in such places as Exodus 2:24 and Numbers 15:40.

. . . καὶ ἐμνήσθη ὁ θεὸς τῆς διαθήκης αὐτοῦ τῆς πρὸς Ἀβραὰμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ.
. . . and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.
(Ex. 2:24 LXX – NKJV)
ὅπως ἂν μνησθῆτε καὶ ποιήσητε πάσας τὰς ἐντολάς μου, καὶ ἔσεσθε ἅγιοι τῷ θεῷ ὑμῶν.
and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God.
(Numb. 15:40 LXX – NKJV)

Figure 4. Examples of covenant-remembrance language from the Septuagint.

58. 1 Pet. 1:13 NKJV.

In the New Testament, the notions of Old Testament prophecy and covenantal remembrance are connected again in the Benedictus, where the same verbal root appears: καὶ μνησθῆναι διαθήκης ἁγίας αὐτοῦ.[59] Throughout the Gospel of John, the disciples were reminded of biblical prophecies as they witnessed Jesus fulfill them: ἐμνήσθησαν δὲ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ ὅτι γεγραμμένον ἐστίν, Ὁ ζῆλος τοῦ οἴκου σου κατέφαγέ με.[60] See also that one of the stated functions of the Holy Spirit is to assist Christ's disciples in recalling his teachings: καὶ ὑπομνήσει ὑμᾶς πάντα ἃ εἶπον ὑμῖν.[61]

Thus, considering the rich scriptural significance of this verb, it is safe to affirm that Peter was not merely desirous that his readers would recall information from the past, but rather that they would properly and actively respond to the knowledge imparted to them.[62] Moreover, the objects of recollection — those prophetic words and apostolic rules —, being so highly recommended by the apostle, must be of major covenantal importance.

As for the identity of "the holy prophets," this expression is also found, again, in the Benedictus in a clear reference to old covenant prophecy: καθὼς ἐλάλησε διὰ στόματος τῶν ἁγίων τῶν απ᾽ αἰῶνος προφητῶν αὐτοῦ.[63] Likewise, the very apostle Peter, in Acts 3:21.[64] That the Old

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59. Luke 1:72 Scrivener.

60. John 2:17 Scrivener.

61. John 14:26 Scrivener.

62. Spencer A. Jones, "Memory," in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, ed. Douglas Mangum, Derek R. Brown, Rachel Klippenstein, and Rebekah Hurst (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2014).

63. Luke 1:70 Scrivener.

64. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 287.

Testament was commonly termed "the Law and the Prophets" is well attested in Scriptures.[65] However, in a few occasions, the old-covenant authors are termed only "the prophets." In the prologue of Hebrews, for example, divine revelation to the fathers had been mediated ἐν τοῖς προφήταις, in contrast to ἐν υἱῷ.[66] In the opening chapter of Romans, the apostle terms the Old Testament authors "His prophets."[67]

The word προφήτης is the usual translation of the hebrew נָבִיא "prophet" in the Septuagint, and thus evokes a rich theological significance. In Old Testament usage, the prophet was a spokesman for God. This theology is carefully built throughout Scriptures beginning in the Pentateuch,[68] and such was the representative authority of the office that the prophet would have been regarded as a mouth of God.[69] Understanding the serious and beneficial character of their utterances led several prophets to commit their words to writing.[70] The New Testament also has a high view of the prophetic office, particularly the writing prophets, as these were fundamental agents to the nourishing of the messianic hope that was realized in the gospel age. The apostolic writers considered the human authors of Scriptures — which at that time was a reference mainly to the Old Testament — to be spokesmen for God, divinely aided in the performance of their task.[71]

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65. cf. Matt. 7:12; Luke 16:16; John 1:45; Acts 13:15; Rom. 3:21 NKJV; &c.

66. Heb. 1:1, 2 Scrivener.

67. Rom. 1:1, 2 NKJV.

68. cf. Exo. 7:1; Deut. 18:18; 2 Sam. 23:1–3; Jer. 1:7, 9, 17 NKJV; &c.

69. cf. Jer. 15:19 NKJV.

70. C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books* (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 32.

71. 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 2:20, 21 NKJV.

To the words of the holy prophets is paralleled the expression τῆς τῶν ἀποστόλων ἡμῶν ἐντολῆς "the commandment of the apostles ourselves."[72] The word ἐντολή is the usual translation of מִצְוָה in the Septuagint. It is more frequently used in reference to specific commands, unlike the general νόμος or תּוֹרָה. In the Old Testament, it refers to a command or decree from an authority such as God, Moses, or the king, almost always of a religious character. Notably, it is used in connection to the Ten Commandments and the Shema.[73]

In the gospels, Jesus is asked ποία ἐντολή μεγάλη ἐν τῷ νόμῳ,[74] ratifies his adherence to "the least of these commandments,"[75] and gives his disciples the ἐντολὴν καινὴν.[76] He also challenged the scribes and pharisees' tradition by asking, "Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?"[77] In other place, this word has also been used in the more common sense of "an order, direction,"[78] or with the nuance of "a charge, commission."[79] Second Peter also features this word in the second chapter, where he sets "the way of righteousness" in parallel to "the holy commandment delivered to them,"[80] which he treats as the objects of salvific knowledge in that verse.

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72. 2 Pet. 3:2 Scrivener.

73. Exo. 24:12; Deut. 6:1, 2 LXX.

74. Matt. 22:36 Scrivener.

75. Matt. 5:19 NKJV.

76. John 13:34 Scrivener.

77. Matt. 15:3 KJV.

78. cf. Acts 17:15 NKJV.

79. cf. John 10:18; 12:49, 50; 1 Tim. 6:14; et al.

80. 2 Pet. 2:21 NKJV.

Interestingly, there is some semantic intersection between the words ἐντολή and κανών, which became a reference to the list of books in the Bible a few centuries later. The word κανών was used by the apostle Paul in the senses of "a prescribed range of action or duty," or "a rule of conduct or doctrine."[81] First Clement used it to mean a moral standard or a measure of allotted service.[82] Irenæus also used this same word when arguing against the valentinians' use of Scriptures out of context.

> In like manner he also who retains unchangeable in his heart the rule of the truth which he received by means of baptism, will doubtless recognise the names, the expressions, and the parables taken from the Scriptures, but will by no means acknowledge the blasphemous use which these men make of them. . . . But when he has restored every one of the expressions quoted to its proper position, and has fitted it to the body of the truth, he will lay bare, and prove to be without any foundation, the figment of these heretics."[83]

There is sufficient biblical support for the notion that Christ conferred authority to his apostles to proclaim his gospel and advance his church.[84] The apostolic office included that prophetic warrant to speak a message received from God on his behalf. Paul claimed to have preached to the Thessalonians οὐ λόγον ἀνθρώπων, ἀλλὰ καθώς ἐστιν ἀληθῶς, λόγον Θεοῦ,[85] and also to have written to the Corinthians τοῦ Κυρίου ἐντολαί.[86] Thus, he understood his words to be as authoritative as the words that came out of Jesus's mouth during his earthly ministry.

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81. Harold K. Moulton, *The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised*, s.v. "κανών" (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978).

82. *TDNTA*, s.v. "kanṓn;" cf. 1 Clem. 7:2; 41:1.

83. Irenæus, "Against Heresies," 1.9.4, in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, vol. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers. — Justin Martyr. — Irenæus.* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 330.

84. cf. Matt. 10:20; Mark 3:14, 15; John 20:21; Acts 10:41, 42 NKJV; &c.

85. 1 Thess. 2:13 Scrivener.

86. 1 Co. 14:37 Scrivener.

Thus, Second Peter not only describes the nature of the canonical material, but also prescribes the criteria for the church's later duty of canon recognition. The canon should contain the ancient oracles of God as delivered in the Old Testament,[87] as well as the new writings imposed by the apostles. Thus, the criterion of New Testament canonicity is not strictly apostolic authorship, but rather apostolic sanction and prescription.[88]

Therefore, when the author exhorts his readers to be mindful of the predictions of the prophets and the commandment of the apostles, what he is recommending is the bi-covenantal canon of the Old and New Testaments, the authoritative rule established by God and delivered to the church via the prophets and apostolic writers.[89] The same sense is also implied by Paul when he tells the Ephesians that they have been "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,"[90] which Tertullian defends against Marcion — who denied the authority of the Old Testament.

> "built upon the foundation of the apostles" — (the apostle added), "and the prophets;" these words, however the heretic erased, forgetting that the Lord had set in His Church not only apostles, but prophets also. He feared, no doubt, that our building was to stand in Christ upon the foundation of the ancient prophets, since the apostle himself never fails to build us up everywhere with (the words of) the prophets. For whence did he learn to call Christ "the chief cornerstone," but from the figure given him in the Psalm: "The stone which the builders rejected is become the head (stone) of the corner?"[91]

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87. Rom. 3:1, 2 NKJV.

88. Warfield, "The Formation of the Canon of the New Testament," 415, 416.

89. Michael J. Kruger, "2 Peter 3:2, the Apostolate, and a Bi-covenantal Canon," *JETS* 63, no. 1 (2020): 7–9.

90. Eph. 2:20 NKJV.

91. Tertullian, "The Five Books Against Marcion," transl. Peter Holmes, 5.17, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, vol. 3, *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, ed. Allan Menzies (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, n.d.), 467.

Peter's long string of genitives closes with the expression τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ σωτῆρος.[92] The antecedent of this genitive could be τῆς ἐντολῆς, which would create a double possessive genitive construction, attributing the command to both the apostles and the Lord-Savior.[93] Albeit theologically and grammatically viable, the passage reads even better if τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ σωτῆρος be read in reference to the whole sequence of genitives.

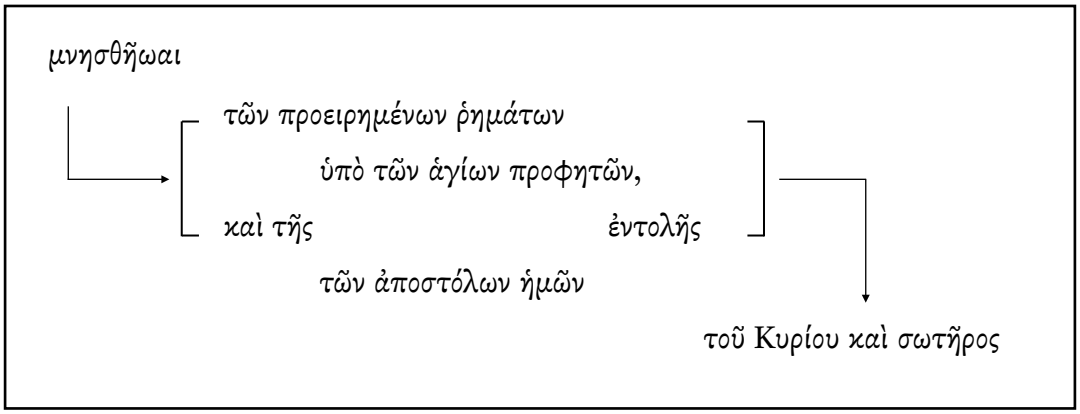


Figure 5. Phrasing of 2 Peter 3:2.

This reading allows both the prophetic and the apostolic words to be considered "of the Lord and Savior," which is consistent with petrine theology.[94] Seeing that knowledge in Second Peter leads to salvation,[95] the apostle could not recommend any other object as highly as the words of Christ himself to his readers. Throughout the New Testament, the apostles agree together in their common exhortation to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly," and so to "be filled with the Spirit."[96]

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92. 2 Pet. 3:2 Scrivener.

93. M. Green, *2 Peter and Jude*, 135.

94. see, e.g., 1 Pet. 1:10–12 NKJV.

95. cf. 2 Pet. 1:3 NKJV; et. al.

96. Col. 3:16 // Eph. 5:18 NKJV.

"In the Last Days"

[3:3] *knowing this first, that, in the last days,*
there shall come mockers, walking after their own desires,

The author presents, by contrast, those that are not mindful of Scriptures, and instead mock them. The expression τοῦτο πρῶτον γινώσκοντες had been already used before in the same letter,[97] and there appears to be an intended conceptual contrast between the two passages. See comparison below.

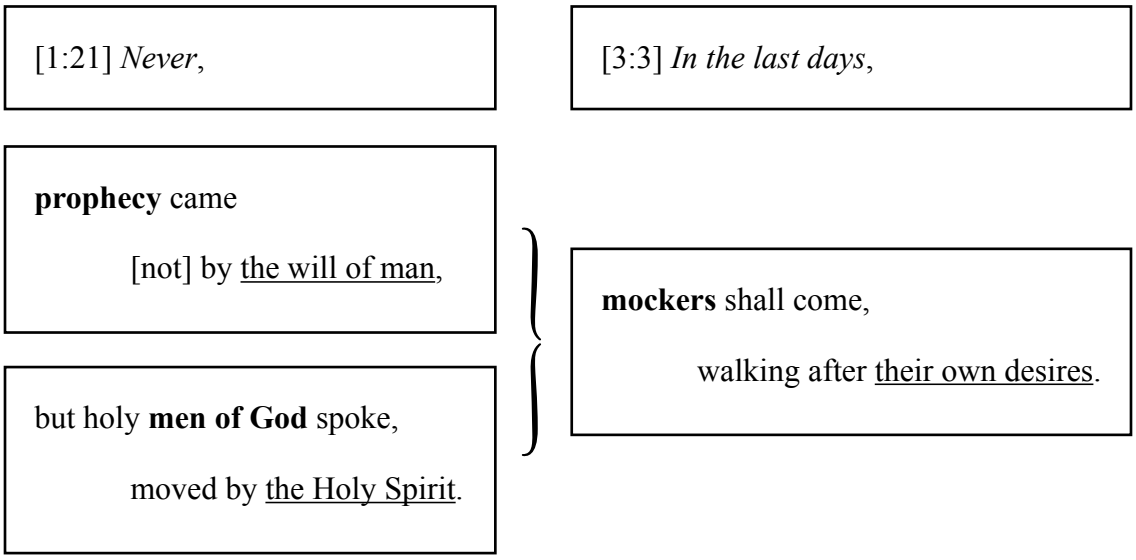


Figure 6. Contrast prophets-mockers.

The author's use of "in the last days" refers to his own age, the new-testament era, marked by the manifestation of Jesus Christ. This use is clearly consistent throughout the canonic gospels and epistles, including Peter himself,[98] and the Apostolic Fathers agree with this reading as well.[99]

97. 2 Pet. 1:20, 21 Scrivener.

98. cf. Acts 2:17; 2 Tim. 3:1; Heb. 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:20; 1 John 2:18 NKJV.

99. see, e.g., 2 Clement 14:2; Ignatius to the Ephesians 11:1; in Kirsopp Lake, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1912–1913).

[3:4] *and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things remain as they were from the beginning of creation.*

The question should not be read as the longing of a true believer, but as a challenge. The mockers could not have hope in the promise because they looked to the creation instead of the Creator.[100] They appealed to the regularity of the created order as their security. "The fathers" is a reference not to the first generation of the apostolic church, but to the old-testament saints, as discussed above.[101]

[3:5] *For they willfully neglect this: that the heavens were of old, and the earth, standing out of water and in the midst of water, by the word of God;*

The force of the verb λανθάνειν "to neglect, to overlook," indicates that the mockers are doing the exact opposite of the apostle's exhortation.[102] Peter begins his argument with an appeal to the first creation. The reference seems to be to God's creation method described in the first chapter of Genesis. By God's command, the earth appeared out of the seas and through the seas, that is, in the midst of them.[103]

Thus, the preposition διά should be read as locative, not instrumental. Albeit less common, a graphically helpful example of this use is found in the synoptic gospels, when Jesus and the disciples went διὰ τῶν σπορίμων "through the corn [fields]."[104] Then, when the author states the means of creation, he uses instead the dative with no preposition, τῷ τοῦ Θεοῦ λόγῳ "by the word of God."

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100. cf. Rom. 1:25 NKJV et al.

101. see p. 8, with respective notes

102. 2 Pet. 3:1, 2 NKJV.

103. Gen. 1:9 NKJV.

104. Matt. 12:1 // Mark 2:23 // Luke 6:1 Scrivener.

[3:6] *on account of whom, the world then,*
having been flooded by water, was destroyed.

Peter here disproves his opponents claims, demonstrating that the world had been already destroyed once since creation. The reference to the great deluge is clear, when "all flesh in which [was] the breath of life" died,[105] except for those with Noah in the ark. The apostle wants to prove that, since the fallen word is temporally bound, one's hope should be placed somewhere permanent instead.[106]

[3:7] *But the present heavens and earth are kept by the same word, being*
stored up unto fire until the day of judgment and destruction of impious men.

The apostle posits that the same God who once destroyed the world by water will soon destroy it by fire. That "the heavens and the earth are kept by the same word" was first promised to Noah out of the ark.[107] This verse echoes the language from the prophet Isaiah, where the ἡμέραν κρίσεως, "day of judgment," is first introduced in terms of unquenchable fire.[108]

[3:8] *However, do not neglect this one thing, beloved, that one day*
for the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

Peter exhorts his readers not to forget as the mockers did in verse five. The apostle borrows from Psalm 90, and applies it to the context of the παρουσία. "The desire of the Psalmist is to contrast the eternity of God with the short span of human life. What St. Peter wishes is to contrast the eternity of God with the impatience of human expectations."[109]

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105. Gen. 6:17 NKJV.

106. Richard C. Gamble, *The Whole Counsel of God*, vol. 2, *The Full Revelation of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2018), 956, 957.

107. Gen. 8:21, 22 NKJV.

108. Isa. 34 NKJV.

109. Bigg, *St. Peter and St. Jude*, 295.

[3:9] *The Lord is not slack concerning the promise, as some consider slackness;*
but rather is long-suffering toward us, not willing anyone to be destroyed,
but for all to attain unto repentance.

Then, the apostle clarifies that the Lord's apparent delay was actually an act of condolence on his part. God works the salvation of mankind throughout history, and he is still gathering his people from among all corners of the earth. This notion is consistent with pauline theology, who also taught that God's forbearance is meant to allow time for repentance prior to the judgment day.[110]

> The provision which God has made for the salvation of men. . . has in view the manifoldness of man's need and exhibits the overflowing abundance of God's goodness, wisdom, grace, and love. This superabundance appears in the eternal counsel of God respecting salvation; it appears in the historic accomplishment of redemption by the work of Christ once for all; and it appears in the application of redemption continuously and progressively till it reaches its consummation in the liberty of the glory of the children of God.[111]

The words τινας "any," and πάντας "all," in this verse, are properly understood as referring to the elect yet uncalled.[112] In other words, the Lord is "long-suffering toward us," his elect, thus he is "not willing anyone [of us] to be destroyed, but for all [of us] to attain unto repentance." The greatest hope of the believer is the Father's will that "of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day."[113]

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110. Rom. 2:4, 5 NKJV.

111. John Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955), 79.

112. Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, vol. 3, *Matthew to Revelation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 926.

113. John 6:39 NKJV.

"But the Day of the Lord"

[3:10] *But the day of the Lord shall come as a thief in the night;*
in which the heavens, with a noise, shall pass away;
and the elements, being burned, shall be undone;
and the earth, with the works therein, shall be consumed.

Peter evokes the Old Testament theology of the ἡμέρα Κυρίου, abundant in the prophetic literature. The simile to a thief in the night connects Second Peter to Christ's prophetic sermon in the synoptic gospels,[114] to pauline teaching,[115] as well as to the Apocalypsis.[116] In all instances, the warning is to watchfulness based on the imminence and unpredictability of the παρουσία.

The day of judgment the Lord is described in cataclysmic language, as it was so commonly in the prophets of the Old Testament. Whereas in the great deluge, the destruction appears to have been more focused on the annihilation of living beings,[117] here the apostle makes it clear that no realm of creation should be spared in the final judgment, since the divine plan of redemption must also include the full restoration of the material world.[118] As in the former judgment, the house of Noah, preacher of righteousness, was saved from destruction by water in the ark;[119] at the final day, the seekers of righteousness and humility will be hidden from the fire of the Lord's anger.[120]

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114. Matt. 24:42, 43; Luke 12:39, 40 NKJV.

115. cf. 1 Thess. 5:2 NKJV.

116. Rev. 3:3; 16:15 NKJV.

117. Gen. 6:17 NKJV; although earth certainly suffered to a great extent.

118. cf. Rom. 8:18–23 NKJV.

119. 2 Pet. 2:5 NKJV.

120. Zeph. 2:3 NKJV.

The final clause of this verse features a major textual challenge, to the point that many well-known scholars assume that the original reading might have been lost,[121] contra the confessional notion of providential preservation.[122] The oldest witnesses contain the verbal form εὑρεθήσεται lacking a predicate, which has no known precedent in koine usage. Papyrus 72 adds the word λυόμενα after the verb. Some versions state it in the negative, οὐχ εὑρεθήσεται, but no extant greek witness. Codex C has ἀφανισθήσονται, a synonym. Codex Alexandrinus, with the majority of witnesses, has κατακαήσεται. Others omit the clause altogether.

Reading	**Manuscript support**	**Linguistically viable?**
εὑρεθήσεται	early, multiple	no
οὐχ εὑρεθήσεται	versions only	yes
ἀφανισθήσονται	early, scarce	yes
κατακαήσεται	early, multiple	yes

Table 1. Evidence comparison for textual variants in verse 10.

The extant witnesses support κατακαήσεται, which appears in A, 048, 049, 056, 0142, 33, 614, lectionaries, and various versions. Note also a connection to Psalm 75, a psalm which concentrates on the theme of the day of judgment. The Lord announces there is an appointed time: “when I choose the proper time, I will judge uprightly.” The earth and all in it will melt:

121. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd. ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2002), 636, 637.

122. “The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical; . . . .” “The Westminster Confession of Faith,” 1:8.

"the earth and all its inhabitants are dissolved." The righteous — one of Second Peter's key words, as discussed formerly — prevail at the end: "all the horns of the wicked I will also cut off, [but] the horns of the righteous shall be exalted."[123]

Another important connection comes from First Corinthians. Paul speaks of a Day when men's works would be tested by fire.[124] In that passage, the apostle uses the same verbal form to refer to the burning of works. The difference in nuance is that Paul clearly meant the deeds of men, whereas "works" in Second Peter might also mean God's creation. Peter may have intentionally imported pauline language into Old Testament imagery to reinforce his point that believers ought to be mindful of both the prophets and the apostles. This is consistent with his commendation of the words of Paul later in the chapter: Peter begins introducing pauline language and doctrine gradually, as if preparing the minds of the audience for his inter-apostolic mention later on.[125]

[3:11] *All these being undone, how then ought you to proceed in regard to holy conduct and piety?*

If the mockers had a question that led to spiritual idleness, the apostle now challenges his readers to action with a better question. As he had suggested before, "the holy commandment delivered to them" was "the way of righteousness."[126] A righteous conduct is a fundamental aspect of life in Second Peter, one of the main contrasts between the beloved of the third chapter and the false prophets of the second.

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123. Ps. 75:2, 3, 10 NKJV.

124. 1 Co. 3:10–17 NKJV.

125. 2 Pet. 3:15, 16 NKJV.

126. 2 Pet. 2:21 NKJV.

[3:12] *expecting and hastening the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens on fire shall be undone, and the elements, burning, shall melt.*

The apostle suggests a balanced approach to the day of God: there should be patient expectance and fervent desire at the same time, with diligent preparation.[127] Here, the author also equates "the day of the Lord," which is elsewhere termed "the day of Christ," with "the day of God," thus attributing divinity to Jesus.[128]

In this verse, Peter's description of the judgment scene seem to import language from the prophet Isaiah, as the literary connection between the texts is strong. Isaiah describes a ἡμέρα κρίσεως that involves the destruction of the skies. The "elements" seem to correspond to the "host" in Isaiah, thus signifying the stars. The same image is repeated in the Apocalypsis, following the cry of the martyred saints for justice. Only those who are certain of being among "the number of those who were sealed" can truly hope for and hasten such a fearful day.[129]

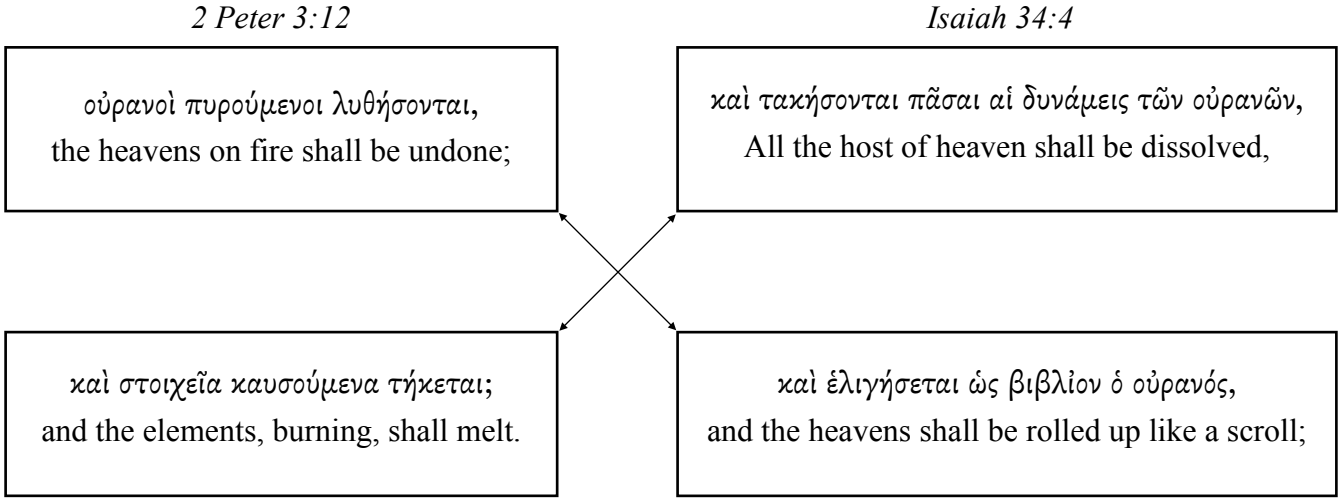


Figure 7. Comparison Peter-Isaiah.

127. Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3:927.

128. Calvin, "Commentary on Second Peter."

129. Rev. 6:10, 14; 7:4 NKJV.

[3:13] *But we expect, according to his promise,*
new heavens and new earth, wherein righteousness dwells.

Peter again grounds his argument on old-testament prophecy. The hope of the believer is based upon the certainty of the Lord's promise, which the author connects to the books of the prophets. The reference is to the prophecies of Isaiah once again. Interestingly, after the creation of new heavens and a new earth in Isaiah, "the former shall not be remembered or come to mind."[130] The remembrance of the words of the prophets and of the commandment of the apostles leads to the complete forgetfulness of sin and evil.

The believers' final hope is not destruction, but redemption. The word καινός indicates that "this new creation comes forth out of the old creation."[131] As the waters of the deluge did not annihilate the earth, but rather reformed it, so the new creation shall be a refined, purified version of the current.[132]

The moral aspect is foundational to the reformation of earth. The prophet Isaiah describes the new creation as a land of abundant righteousness and peace.[133] In Revelation, we read that "there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life."[134] The use of the word κατοικεῖ conveys the idea of permanent, nor temporary housing.[135]

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130. Isa. 65:17; see also 66:22 NKJV.

131. Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and of the Epistle of Jude*, in *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987), 340.

132. Henry Alford, *Alford's Greek Testament: An Exegetical and Critical Commentary*, 5th ed., vol. 4, pt. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Guardian, 1976), 418.

133. see, esp., Isa. 1:26, 27; 33:1, 16, 17; 33:5; 60:21 NKJV.

134. Rev. 21:27 NKJV.

135. Kistemaker, *Peter and Jude*, 341.

[3:14] *Wherefore, beloved, expecting this, be diligent*
that you may be found by him spotless and blameless, in peace.
[3:15] *And consider the long-suffering of our Lord to be salvation, . . .*

In contrast to the mockers neglectful idleness,[136] the beloved should act diligently upon their sure hope. Again, Peter shares with Paul the notion of one's character being discovered and tested for holiness.[137] The use of the pair "spotless and blameless" is more clearly connected to the sacrificial system by the apostle elsewhere, as being fulfilled in Christ.[138] Other apostolic authors have used both words separately and similar pairs,[139] exhorting their readers to pursue a godly character. Paul uses both roots in reference to the church's sanctification as the bride of Christ.[140] The same apostle also taught that the bloody sacrifice of Christ established εἰρήνη between God and man, who having become his workmanship, is now enabled to perform good works in Christ.[141]

Peter closes the section by referring back to the long-suffering of the Lord, thus emphasizing what he had argued for in verse 9.[142] This verse contains the only occurrence of σωτηρία in the whole epistle, although the concept is foundational to petrine theology, being defined elsewhere as "the end of your faith" and the great object of the prophet's inquiry.[143]

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136. cf. 2 Pet. 3:8 NKJV.

137. 1 Co. 3:13, 17 NKJV.

138. 1 Pet. 1:19 Scrivener.

139. see, e.g., Jas. 1:27; Phil. 2:15; 1 Tim. 6:14 Scrivener.

140. Eph. 5:27 Scrivener.

141. Eph. 2:10–18 NKJV.

142. Kistemaker, *Peter and Jude*, 343.

143. 1 Pet. 1:5, 9, 10; comp. Rom. 2:1–4 NKJV.

"And So in All His letters"

[3:15] *even as our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom on him bestowed, has written to you,* [3:16] *and so in all [his] letters, speaking in them concerning these matters; . . .*

The author presupposes that at least some of the pauline corpus was available and familiar to his own audience. How many and which epistles are being referenced is hard to ascertain, but it is safe to assume that the readers would have been aware of Paul's teachings. Peter interacts with and validates the letters of Paul, reminding his audience that both apostles were "speaking in them concerning these [same] matters."

> And it must be noted that Peter here praises the wisdom of Paul, whereas Paul says of himself, *For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, since I persecuted the Church of God*. . . .[144] [Paul] in his Letters reproved Peter,[145] and yet Peter himself, reading through the same Letters, judges them worthy of praise, because undoubtedly the fact that he found himself rightly reproved in them he accepted not disdainfully as an insult but gladly as a sign of affirmation. Not just any human beings know how to behave in this way towards each other but only those who have learned from the Lord to be meek and humble of heart, who know how to anticipate each other in showing honor.[146]

[3:16] *wherein there are some matters hard to understand, which the unlearned and unstable distort, even as they do to the rest of the scriptures, to their own destruction.*

Peter acknowledges that "all things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, not alike clear unto all."[147] However, the category of people that he condemns is not the uninformed or uneducated, but those that reject the wisdom of God, those "who suppress the truth in

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144. 1 Co. 15:9 in op. cit.

145. Gal. 2:11 NKJV.

146. Bede the Venerable, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, transl. David Hurst, vol. 82 in *Cistercian Studies Series* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1985), 153, 154.

147. "The Westminster Confession of Faith," 1.7.

unrighteousness."[148] Knowledge in petrine theology is a means of salvation and fellowship with God,[149] and as such, has a deeply moral value. Peter's sentence echoes the imprecations of wisdom literature on the foolish: "the turning away of the simple will slay them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them."[150]

Furthermore, Peter equates the writings of Paul to inspired Scriptures. Here the author offers an example of the "commandments of the apostles," which he had mentioned earlier in the chapter: the epistles of Paul. Accepting the authorship claims spread throughout the letter,[151] the reference to pauline writings as authoritative shows evidence to a much earlier canon formation than is generally assumed. In fact, the testimony of the early fathers assumes the existence of a set of apostolic writings alongside the Old Testament, of equal authority.

Justin Martyr (c. 150–160), upon describing the assemblies of worship, included the reading of the memoirs of the apostles and the writings of the prophets side by side[152] — that is, "a bi-covenantal revelation from God."[153] In the Muratorian Fragment (c. 180), our earliest extant canonical list, the author rejects the canonicity of the *Shepherd of Hermas* over the fact that it could not be included under neither the prophets nor the apostles.[154]

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148. Rom. 1:18 NKJV.

149. 2 Pet. 1:2–8; 2:20; 3:17, 18 NKJV.

150. Prov. 1:32 NKJV.

151. cf. 2 Pet. 1:1, 13, 18; 3:1, 2 NKJV.

152. Justin Martyr, "The First Apology of Justin," ch. 67, in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, vol. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers. — Justin Martyr. — Irenæus.* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 185, 186.

153. Kruger, "2 Peter 3:2, the Apostolate, and a Bi-covenantal Canon," 19, 20.

154. *Ibid*., 20; following B. M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 307.

Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150–211), although considered eclectic in his use of extra-canonical material, made a sharp distinction between the *Gospel According to the Egyptians* and the four "handed-down" gospels.[155] Tertullian (ca. A.D. 155–225) accused Marcion of mutilating Scriptures to his own purposes,[156] and offered an exposition of pauline theology, letter by letter. At the end thereof, he notes Marcion's omission of three pastoral epistles, thus completing the undisputed pauline corpus known today.[157] He treats Scriptures as an "entire instrument," and such corruptions as "a later process."[158] The catholic epistles are the least agreed upon by early authors, due in a great part to their shortness and slow circulation.[159] It must be noted, however, that "slow circulation and authentication is not the same as slow canonization."[160]

The testimony of the early fathers corroborates the notion of canon formation through apostolic imposition rather than later church consensus. It is true that the marcionite controversy put pressure on the church to clarify her canon definitions.[161] However, the church's response was naturally to look to the past, to what has ever been, and surprisingly with much more agreement than disagreement. The church had a "handed-down" canon to look back to.

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155. Clement of Alexandria, "Stromata," 3.13.93, in *Die griechischen christlichen schriftsteller der ersten drei jahrhunderte: Clemens Alexandrinus*, vol 2, ed. Otto Stählin (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1906). For a fuller treatment of the case, see C. E. Hill, *Who Chose the Gospels?: Probing the Great Gospel Conspiracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 70–75.

156. Tertullian, "The Prescription Against Heretics," transl. Peter Holmes, ch. 38, in *ANF3*, 261, 262.

157. Tertullian, "The Five Books Against Marcion," bk. 5.

158. Tertullian, "The Prescription Against Heretics," ch. 38.

159. Warfield, "The Canon of the New Testament," 414, 415.

160. Gamble, *The Whole Counsel of God*, 2:58.

161. *Ibid*. Vol. 3, *God's People in the Western World* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2021), 55.

This is contrary to the definition of canon as "a fallible collection of infallible books."[162] Evangelical teachers, in a well-intentioned attempt to counter the romanist notion of church infallibility, have produced a contradictory concept. Indeed, if the process of canonization had been slowly conducted by the patristic church, the result would have been a fallible list. However, "the prophet-apostle infrastructure shows that the canon, in a sense was 'closed' from the very start."[163] Thus, the definition is the same for both groups, with diverging reasons, rather.

	Collection?	*Books?*	*Why?*
Rome	infallible	infallible	church decree
Reformed	infallible	infallible	apostolic imposition

Table 2. Same definition for different reasons.

"Grow in Grace and Knowledge"

[3:17] *Therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on watch,*
lest having been carried away by the error of the lawless,
you fall away from your own stability.

The final two verses close the whole epistle's argument with exhortation and doxology. The hope in the promises found in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments should be sufficient aid to the readers against being led away by the uprising false teachers. Even so, the apostle's tone is one of warning: if knowledge of the truth would lead to salvation and a life of righteousness, error could lead instead to falling away into lawlessness. Knowledge, again, proves to be deeply connected to behavior in petrine theology.[164]

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162. R. C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith* (Minneapolis, MN: Grason, 1992), 22.

163. Kruger, "2 Peter 3:2, the Apostolate, and a Bi-covenantal Canon," 24.

164. M. Green, *2 Peter and Jude*, 163.

[3:18] *But grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Unto him be the glory, both now and to eternal days. Amen.*

The author posits that perseverance demands constant progress, "for it is the only way of persevering, to make continual advances, and not to stand still in the middle of our journey; as though he had said, that they only would be safe who laboured to make progress daily."[165] The word χάρις in this verse may be understood as "those spiritual gifts we obtain through Christ,"[166] whereas γνῶσις is the means of obtaining them.[167]

The final doxology attributes the divine attributes of glory and eternality to Jesus Christ.[168] The glory of Christ is not to remain as a distant reality, but rather should affect the present life of the believer. At the same time, the believer's eyes should be set εἰς ἡμέραν αἰῶνος, "which will make known to us his full and perfect glory."[169]

> Glory always to God and the Lord our Saviour both now, when amidst the daily pressures of adversities we still live in the body and are straggling away from him, and particularly then, when the long *desired of all nations*[170] will have come and deigned to enlighten us with the presence of his vision. Meanwhile we deserve to sigh for him and earnestly sing, *Because one day in your courts is better than thousands*.[171] [172]

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165. Calvin, "Commentary on Second Peter."

166. *Ibid*.

167. John Owen, ed., footnote in op. cit.

168. Calvin, "Commentary on Second Peter."

169. *Ibid*.

170. Hag. 2:8 in op. cit.

171. Ps. 84:10 in op. cit.

172. Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 156.

"Therefore, Beloved"

Second Peter, one of the most disputed books in the canon, makes bold assertions concerning Scripture authority and end. The author recommends the work of the prophets and his fellow-apostles as the object of the highest regard to his audience. Thereby, the apostle gave us more than a criterion for later evaluation, but the self-defined canon of Scriptures. The church's duty and privilege since then has been to embrace what Scriptures declare about themselves.

The apostle appealed to the power of the Word against his opponents. What they willfully ignored, he presented as evidence of divine providence upholding the created order. The same Word that created the world out of water, flooded it thereby, and has preserved it therefrom. The seemingly stability and predictability of nature should not lead man to self-reliance, but rather to seek for meaning in the Creator.

The apostle grounded eternal hope on the promises of Scriptures. He used fulfilled prophecy both to demonstrate its reliability and to encourage future hope. The promises are sure because of the character of the One making them. The hope of the believer is in "the promise of his coming," in the day of Lord. The creation, which now groans, by fire shall be consumed and renewed. The apparent delay of the promise is in reality a provision of great mercy and patience.

Second Peter stresses the importance of filling the mind with Scriptures. Understanding that knowledge is vital for true belief and righteous conduct, the apostle's method to build himself and others up into hope was to recall the words of the prophets and apostles, which are truly the words of Christ. Therefore, anticipating the close of the apostolic age, Peter defines the trustworthy rule of faith and ground of hope for the militant church.[173]

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173. See Appendix for devotional considerations.

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Appendix: Devotional Considerations

Telling truth from falsehood in a world of moral relativism can be an incredible challenge. Post-modern thinkers have not sought to explain the meaning or origins of life in the world anymore, but talk rather of life as a means of self-expression, and of communication as an end in itself. This system is not only unhelpful, but also self-destructive, and has increasingly harmed the bodies and minds of the last few generations. The notion of individual-defined truth has led society to skepticism, and naturally to despair.

Second Peter challenges the hopeless thinker and presents a way out. The last chapter of the epistle illustrates that Scriptures present a full and robust philosophical system, capable of answering humanity's deepest existential questions. They seek to direct fallen man's thinking back toward the face of God. The answer to man's apparent meaninglessness is found in the predictions of the prophets and the commandments of the apostles, that is, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Therefore, let us truly fill our minds with the words of Christ.

1. Despite the immense temporal gap which separates the apostle from our generation, there is a sense in which we are both living in the same age, which Scriptures term *the last days*. One could easily read Peter's description of the skepticism of his days and the type of questions he has to deal with and suppose him to be talking about our generation. But why is that? How can we be so beyond them in time and yet so stuck to the same patterns? The answer lies in the eternality of God. The Everlasting is he who gives meaning to the creature. If one day to the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day, he alone can be our safe dwelling place in all generations. By the word of his mouth, man will live and die.[174]

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174. Ps. 90: 1–6 NKJV.

2. The Eternal God has worked wonderfully to reveal himself in time, and save a people through faith in his promises. His words revealed to the prophets of Old achieved their fulfillment in *the advent of Jesus Christ* the God-man, who embodied the fullness of the Father's glory in human flesh. Jesus was not only a teacher of truth and a perfect example to be followed, but the Savior of all those who should believe in him. He lived the life you could not have lived and died the death you could not have died, that you would be found worthy of receiving his eternal inheritance. In his death and resurrection, you are made like him and receive the power to do the good works which God prepared beforehand that you should walk in.[175] Upon his ascension, he has left you with the teaching of the apostles to encourage you in the sure hope on the promise of his second coming.

3. *The day of the Lord* is the great hope of the believer, but a day of vengeance on the mocker. Man's every work will be tested, and those found in Christ will see his face with joy. Finally, all his promises will be clearly seen and enjoyed, when you and the world will be made free from all sin, corruption, and suffering. Man will glorify and enjoy God forever, and Christ shall be all in all.

Life in the last days is a life of anticipation of and preparation for eternity. The promises of Scriptures remind us of the temporary character of this world, of the beauties of Christ, and of the certainty and imminence of the day of the Lord. These words ought to be your meditation in the morning and night. These words ought to fill your mind, and not to be forgotten. In an age of easy access to books and information, we often take access to the Bible for granted. While it may be easy to read Scriptures in various languages and versions on diverse printed formats and

175. Eph. 2: 10 NKJV.

digital devices, the value of Bible memorization cannot be overstated. Memorized Scripture is well ingested and digested Scripture, and of much greater effect than glanced at, skimmed Scripture. If the word of God has the power to set our hope onto the right direction and convey the true knowledge of Christ, how much ought you and I to eagerly — and why not systematically — apply our minds thereto, and commit it to memory, and live thereby!

This I recall to mind, therefore have I hope,
It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed,
because his compassions fail not.
They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.
The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.
It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.
Lam. 3: 21–26 KJV

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning,
that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.
Rom. 15: 4 KJV

Omnia ad gloriam Dei.