

1-2 Peter, Jude by Rich Lusk

Prologue

Imagine if the White House, the National Cathedral, the Capitol building, the Mercantile Exchange, and Wall Street were all destroyed on the same day. There is no doubt that such a series of tragedies hitting all at once would end American civilization as we know it.

A catastrophe of this magnitude overtook Israel in AD 70 when the Romans destroyed the temple in Jerusalem. The temple was the religious, political, and cultural center of Judaism. The temple was Israel's most important symbol. More than anything else, it gave the Jewish people their identity. It was the heart of their social life in every way. But after its destruction, those who wanted to continue to practice the Jewish faith (apart from Jesus Christ) had to profoundly alter their religion to accommodate for its loss. AD 70 represented the end of biblical Judaism in any true sense.

The destruction of the temple did not come as a total surprise. Historians tell us that Jewish Christians living in or around Jerusalem all fled as the Romans approached, so that not a single Christian was killed. Meanwhile non-Christian Jews were determined to defend the temple, and expected God to help them. But their hopes were dashed, as thousands were slaughtered by the Roman sword or even crucified until the Romans ran out of trees to hang them on. The final humiliation came when the Romans burned the temple to the ground.

How did the Christians know when to flee the city? Why did Jewish Christians so easily part ways with the temple in Jerusalem and the traditions of their fathers? Why did non-Christian Jews insist on fighting a war that, by all reasonable analyses, they could not win? Christians knew the temple would be destroyed because Jesus had told them that within a generation "not one stone would be left upon another" (Matt. 24:2). In fact, the announcing the coming destruction of the temple, and a detailed prophecy of signs leading up to it, were prominent features of Jesus' ministry (Matt. 24:3-35; Luke 17:20-37). Jesus also left no doubt as to the timeframe within which the disastrous event would take place (Matt. 24:34). A "generation" in biblical terms is roughly a forty year period. Between the years AD 30 and AD 70, the apostles continued to remind fledgling congregations of Jesus' prophetic warnings. They explained that the impending destruction of the temple was part of God's plan. From this time forward, God's people would live under a new covenant. They would no longer have to travel to Jerusalem to draw near to the special presence of God. The covenant people would no longer be marked out by circumcision and other unique practices prescribed in the Mosaic law. Instead, God would dwell among the Christian community, wherever it was found (John 4:24; Matt. 18:20; Heb. 10:19ff; 12:18ff). The new Israel would be identified by faith in Christ and the practice of Christ-like love.

The destruction of the temple was not just the end of the Jewish faith as it had existed. It was the end of the old age, the old world order, that God had set up at creation (Mt. 23:35). The destruction of the temple signaled a new beginning in God's plan for history, the inauguration of the new covenant. The destruction of the old temple was in order to make way for the new temple of the church. Between AD 30 and AD 70, there were two temples, each vying for the claim of being God's true house. After AD 70, only one temple was left standing – the church. Jerusalem's temple was seen to be an obsolete counterfeit.

AD 70 not only vindicated Jesus as a true prophet sent from God (and thus trustworthy in everything else he taught and claimed for himself), but it also revealed the church as the fulfillment of the old covenant temple. As glorious as the temple had been, it was only a type or shadow. The reality was to be found in the Christian community. Now God would make his home in the living temple of the church. Now the church's gatherings would be the place where sacrificial worship took place and where heaven and earth were brought together.

Leading up to AD 70, many non-Christian Jews taught that the temple would *not* be destroyed. God would act to defend the temple and give the Jews victory. After all, they were his covenant people. The temple was God's house. How could they lose? But from a Christian perspective, these were false teachers. While they made compelling arguments (e.g., 2 Pet. 3:4) and applied pressure (in the form of economic sanctions and persecution) to their believing countrymen, the apostles showed these Jewish "prophets" were frauds.

These are themes that dominate 1 and 2 Peter and Jude. 1 Peter largely focuses on the church as the new temple, made of living stones, as well as the new priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices to God in worship and service. 2 Peter and Jude focus on the spiritual battle between the church and the false teachers. Those who cling to the testimony of Jesus and the apostles know that the end of the temple and the entire old covenant system is coming very soon. The false teachers insisted that Israel would continue to be God's special people and the temple his special house. Jesus' coming to destroy the temple in AD 70 proved them wrong.

General Information

Author and Context

1 and 2 Peter and Jude are a rather obscure part of the New Testament. But unfamiliarity should not be confused with unimportance. These three letters help round out our understanding of the issues facing the early church.

Liberal scholarship has not been kind to these books, making hay of their supposedly late ecclesiastical recognition as inspired, canonical works, and ascribing them to pseudonymous authors in the early first century, long after the deaths of the apostles. Pseudepigrapha (writings that claim to be by someone else of greater authority) may have

been common at the time but there is no evidence that the early church accepted the practice as legitimate. Indeed, virtually all pseudepigraphical writings seem to have been heretical and were censured by the church fathers.

These epistles claim to have been written by Peter (1 Pt.1:1; 2 Pt. 1:1) and Jude, the brother of James (1), respectively. If they were not authored by these leaders in the apostolic church, they are at best pious frauds and should have been excluded from the canon of Scripture. Especially in the case of 2 Peter, the content of the epistle is very much dependent on its Petrine authorship. If the author did not actually observe the Transfiguration of our Lord, he is a false witness (2 Pt. 1:16-18; cf. Mt. 17:1-8) and his argument worthless.

All three letters address the transition from old covenant to new in redemptive history. 1 Peter shows the great privileges and obligations that come with membership in the new covenant community. 2 Peter and Jude face challenges from unbelieving Judaism, demonstrating that the prophecies of Jesus about the fall of the temple have not been disproved. Indeed, the prophetic word is as sure as ever. 2 Peter and Jude seek to encourage Jewish Christians who are facing pressure from the false teachers to turn back to Judaism. They stress perseverance as both a human work (2 Pet. 1:5-11) and (more foundationally) a divine gift (1 Pet. 5:10; Jude 24)

Significance

If these three letters deal with first century issues, how can they be relevant for today? These books are important because of what they teach us about the church. The church is the central institution in history, yet many contemporary Christians do not understand its significance.

Most everyone agrees that people today lack community. We are a nation of individualists. Our commitment to individualism shows itself in all kinds of ways. Family meals are far less common than they once were. We are now accustomed to eating on the go and alone, often in our cars or work cubicles. It is rare for us to get to know our neighbors, even in safe, plush suburban settings. Contemporary home architecture has shrunk dining rooms and living rooms – areas of the home designed for interpersonal contact – and instead includes large entertainment centers, built around the television. Advertising campaigns treat us as isolated consumers, appealing to our desire for individuality, autonomy, and an inflated sense of self-worth. Our iPods and X-Boxes allow us to tune the whole world out whenever we want and to lose ourselves in a private reality. We spend far more time investing ourselves in personalized pursuits that involve no interaction with other people than any generation in history (e.g., watching television and movies, playing video games, exercising alone, listening to music in private, driving in the car alone, etc.). Despite rhetoric about a global village, it seems the smaller the world gets, the harder it becomes for us to find a “village” characterized by real fellowship and friendship. We have a hard time connecting with one another in deep ways.

This individualism has crept into the church. Many Christians today have a very high view of their personal relationship with Jesus and a very low view of the church community. They think of the church as an optional “extra.” To the extent that the church helps them in their personal devotion, it is worthwhile. But they think of their Christian walk as something more or less independent of the church. Private “quiet times” are preferred over gathered worship. Listening to Christian radio and recordings make public preaching expendable. The sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are viewed as nothing more than helpful props to devotion, but are hardly essential to salvation. Baptism is not so much about initiation into the church community as it is a sign of a personal decision. The Lord’s Supper is not so much a communal feast, as it is a time for turning inward and focusing on personal issues of sin and repentance. There is no need to be in submission to a body of elders or to have formal church membership.

These epistles challenge this individualistic view of the Christian life. Peter views the church as the community in which we experience God’s presence and salvation. We are not “lone ranger” Christians traveling solo, but a company of sojourners and pilgrims trekking together on the road to our eternal inheritance (1 Pet. 2:11). We are not isolated “atoms,” but “living stones,” being built up into a spiritual house (1 Pet. 2:4-8). We are not independent believers, but fellow members of God’s holy nation and royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9-10). Baptism is not so much a sign of a personal, private choice, but the means through which we enter the ark of the church, the place of salvation (1 Pet. 3:18ff). Jude describes the Lord’s Supper as a love feast, clearly indicating the emphasis is on the mutual participation of the whole community (Jude 12). Everything Peter and Jude say about the Christian life presupposes that the church is the only possible environment in which we can embody a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. For these apostles, God’s ordinary way of saving people includes bringing them into the church community. The accent is on the communal, rather than the individual.

Historical Setting

The era of history between the ascension of Jesus into heaven and the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem was a pivotal period. The new covenant was being set up on the foundation of Jesus, the chief cornerstone, and the apostles (1 Pet. 2:4-10; Eph. 2:19-22). At the same time, the old Mosaic order was winding down. The forty year “grace period” gave Jews a time to transition out of the old Israel into the new. Most New Testament epistles deal with these transitional issues in one way or another. This is why the New Testament gives such attention to the function of the Jewish law, the sign of circumcision, the demise of the temple, the inclusion of believing Gentiles as co-heirs of salvation with believing Jews, and the need for Jewish and Gentile believers to learn how to live in community despite differences in cultural background.

It is easy for us to underestimate the impact of the destruction of the temple in AD 70. Today, many Christians advocate a reading of biblical prophecy that puts many events in the future that actually have already happened. Of course, there *are* prophesied events still to come – the final return of Jesus, the resurrection of the body, and the last judgment. But there are also many events predicted in the New Testament that were

projected to happen within the lifetime of first century believers. All those events have already taken place. (This view of prophecy is called “preterism,” from the Latin term for the past tense).

The destruction of the temple was the climax of the “great tribulation” Jesus described (Matt. 24:29). While Jesus will come bodily at the end of history, he “came” in judgment on the apostate nation of Israel in AD 70. The false teachers denied that Jesus would come in judgment on the temple. They believed the temple – and thus the special status of Israel above the Gentiles – would remain a permanent fixture in the world forever. They doubted the prophecy of Jesus. They pointed out that as the years went by, more and more apostles died, and still nothing happened (2 Pet. 3:4). But their dismissal of the words of Jesus proved to be premature. Because of their unbelief, in AD 70, Jesus took the kingdom from them and gave it to a new people who would bear fruit (Matt. 21:43). Their branches were broken out of the olive tree of the covenant (Rom. 11). When the temple was demolished, the transition from old covenant to new covenant was complete.

It is this transitional situation that surrounds all three of these letters. 1 Peter focuses on the positive side, portraying the church as the new Israel, temple, and priesthood. The apostle assures the suffering (Jewish) believers that their unbelieving (Jewish) persecutors would be judged *soon* by the Lord Jesus (1 Pet. 1:5, 7, 13; 4:3-5, 7, 17; 5:4). 2 Peter and Jude are more negative, dealing with false teachers and prophets arising from within unbelieving Judaism, who are seeking to subvert the gospel and call Jewish Christians back to temple-centered Judaism. Both books remind believers of their great privileges in Christ and the need for faithful endurance under trial.

1 Peter was probably written before AD 44, which is when Peter disappears from the book of Acts (Acts 12). The epistle was written with the aid of Silvanus (probably the same as Silas, Paul’s fellow missionary), which probably accounts for the stylistic differences with 2 Peter (1 Pet. 5:12). In this letter, we see Peter fulfilling his commission from the resurrected Lord to feed the church God’s truth (Jn. 21:15ff) and strengthen his brethren (Lk. 22:32).

1 Peter is addressed to “the Dispersion” scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia (the province, not the continent), and Bithynia (cf. Acts 8:1; 11:19; Jas. 1:1). 2 Peter is apparently addressed to the same group (2 Pt. 3:1) which probably means Jude was also sent to these same recipients. A good case can be made that Peter was addressing specifically Jewish Christians since he was the Apostle to the Circumcision (Gal. 2:7-8) and “the Dispersion” was a common Jewish way of identifying Jews living outside of their ancient land after the Babylonian exile. That Peter was addressing Jewish Christians was the view of the early church historian Eusebius, among others.

At the end of his first epistle, Peter claims to be writing from Babylon (1 Pet. 5:13). Most commentators take this to be Rome, but the majority opinion is by no means certain. It is also possible, if not probable, that Peter is speaking of Jerusalem in a theologically coded way (cf. Rev. 17-19). He probably returned to the mother city of Judaism after the death of Herod in 44 AD and wrote this letter to instruct those out of direct contact with the

apostolic ministry located in Jerusalem. He may have still some kind of connection to the church in Rome later on, as many church traditions suggest.

2 Peter and Jude obviously stand in a close relationship to one another, as the contents of the two books overlap heavily. Word-for-word matching is rare, which probably indicates that one author creatively reshaped material from the other author. But what is nature of the relationship between the two epistles? Who borrowed from whom and why? We lack the historical data we would need to answer with total precision. The best hypothesis links the two books in terms of prediction and fulfillment.

2 Peter was probably written in the mid-AD 60s, predicting the rise of false teachers and an apostasy from the truth. As unbelieving Jews harassed the converted Jews more and more intensely, mocking their hope of vindication, Peter wrote to strengthen their faith and remind them that Jesus had already predicted the rise of false teachers of this sort.

2 Peter functions as something of a last will and testament for the apostle, who knows his death is imminent (2 Pet. 1:13-14). He uses precisely the same language of imminence to describe the judgment about to fall on the false prophets as he does for his own death (2 Pe. 2:1). Even if Peter falls asleep before the judgment falls, the judgment is still certain, it is still soon, and the readers should not give up hope.

These false teachers that have arisen in the “last days” of the old covenant were already foretold by Jesus (Matt. 24:11, 22-25, 47-51). While these false teachers appear to be rejecting the way of Jesus with impunity, Peter says their destruction is near at hand, and intentionally underscores the timeframe (2:1-3).

Jude wrote a follow-up letter a few years later, just as Israel was the brink of war with Rome. Jude shows that the apostasy is starting to happen and urges his readers to contend for the faith rather than falling away. Hence, Jude puts a great deal of emphasis on perseverance in the faith.

Worldview

Suffering

In the gospels, Peter is often a bumbling, stumbling apostle. He is the overconfident spokesman for the twelve, constantly putting his foot in his mouth and failing to live up to his self-appointed status. But at Pentecost Peter is transformed (Acts 2). While he still had occasional slip-ups (Gal. 2:11 ff), he became one of the indisputable leaders of the early church. He finally became the “rock” that Jesus had promised. His maturity as an apostle is easily seen in his first letter.

One area where Peter had to grow up was in his understanding of suffering. Before Jesus’ death and resurrection, Peter thought the kingdom was incompatible with suffering. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, he came to understand that the kingdom comes through suffering, not apart from it. In his first letter, Peter addresses a believers who are

suffering for the sake of their faith. Peter gives them a way of faithfully coping with their suffering by situating it within the Christ-centered purposes of God. Peter says that they have been born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Christ (1:3-5). This hope is nothing less than victory over the ultimate enemy of death. This hope enables them to rejoice even in the midst of trials (1:6-9).

Later, Peter calls on them to follow the example of Christ in suffering wrong for the sake of the gospel. Christians who are the weaker partner in various social relationships (citizens under pagan civil rulers, wives under unbelieving husbands, slaves under cruel masters) should be prepared to endure wrong patiently (1 Pt. 2:13-3:6). Peter calls on them to repay evil with blessing (3:9). They should live righteously so that they suffer only for doing what is right and not as punishment for their foolishness (2:13-17).

Suffering in the body should not surprise them because Christ suffered in body as well. Indeed, such suffering can serve their growth in holiness because it weans them away from worldly lusts (3:18-4:6). According to Peter, obedient suffering is the mark of genuine faithfulness and leads to eschatological blessing. Suffering for the gospel is paradoxically a sign of God's favor, not his rejection (4:12-19; 5:9).

We may not have to suffer the same kind of intense trials that Peter's original audience endured, and for that we should be thankful. At the same time, we must perpetually remember that it will always be impossible to be a Christian without paying a price at some point along the way. Learning to suffer faithfully is an essential component of the Christian life.

Preterism

The New Testament, including these three epistles, is full of imminent eschatological expectation. It is obvious from the pages of the New Testament that the apostles expected some momentous event to take place in the very near future.

Some interpreters have assumed that the apostles were expecting Jesus' final return in their lifetime, and they were therefore mistaken. For example, philosopher Bertrand Russell used the time indicator "this generation" in Matthew 24 to attack the creditability of Jesus. If Jesus was wrong about the timing of his coming, then obviously he was not God in human form. He argued that the apostles' hope for some grand world transforming event in their lifetimes proved false, thus revealing their fallibility.

But that is not an acceptable reading. It is interpreters like Russell, rather than the apostles, who err. In reality, the apostles expected *both* an imminent coming of Christ in judgment on Jerusalem *as well as* a final bodily coming of Jesus at the end of history. The first event had a specified timeframe of forty years from Christ's death and resurrection. The second event is nowhere said to be near at hand.

If we are to read the New Testament properly, it is crucial for us to grasp the significance of Jesus' coming in judgment on the unbelieving covenant nation of Israel. Peter declares

that the end of all things is at hand (1 Pet. 4:7; cf. 4:17). “All things” in this context means all things related to the old covenant order. It is the flip side of saying that Jesus’ first coming made “all things” new (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17).

Noting the “preterist” framework for these epistles sheds a lot of light on difficult texts. For example, In 2 Peter 1:12-21, Peter builds a case for the trustworthiness and urgency of his letter. He explains that the teaching he (and others) gave concerning the coming of the Lord Jesus was not made up or contrived (2 Pet. 1:16), as the false teachers claimed, but came from the Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21). Peter was an eyewitness to the Transfiguration (cf. Mt. 17:1ff), so he is providing a trustworthy testimony. Why is the Transfiguration singled out? Because it was accompanied by a promise of Jesus’ *soon* coming, which now becomes Peter’s main theme (Matt. 16:28; cf. Matt. 24). At the Transfiguration, Peter, James, and John were given a sneak preview of the glory and power that Christ would more fully reveal when he came in judgment to terminate the old covenant. Thus, the prophetic word has been made “more sure.” The prophecy in dispute – the coming of Jesus in power and glory to judge apostate Judaism within a generation of his earthly ministry – is confirmed by the glory already displayed on the “holy mount” in the Transfiguration.

2 Peter 3 sheds light on the actual content of the message of the false teachers, as well as showing the significance of the coming judgment in redemptive history. The false teachers are claiming that Jesus’ promises of coming in judgment on non-Christian Judaism are not coming to pass within a generation. The false teachers are like the false prophets in Jeremiah’s day who were skeptical about the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecies of woe. The temple is still standing, so Jesus must have been wrong, they argue. The false teachers point to the fact that the “fathers” (that is, the first, apostolic Christian generation) are passing from the scene of history, and yet nothing has changed (3:4).

Note that their objection to the promise of Christ’s coming only makes sense if Jesus gave a specific timeframe within which the prophecy was supposed to be fulfilled. Apart from the timeframe, the objection of the false teachers would make no sense. They argue that because Jesus announced an imminent judgment that has not yet come to pass, Jesus must be a false prophet; indeed, they claim that the delay is proof that the promise will never be fulfilled. Peter does not dispute with the false teachers over the *imminency* of Christ’s coming (Peter and the false teachers agree that Jesus predicted he was coming soon), but the *certainty* of it. Peter’s point is that there is still sand in the generation-long hour glass. He does deny not the timeframe, but shows that it has not yet expired.

To understand the imminent “day” (2 Pet. 3:10, 12) Peter has in view, it is important to grasp the language he is using. When Peter talks about scoffers arising in the “last days” (3:3), he is talking about false prophets already alive in his time. The mockers are like those in Noah’s day who did not believe the flood was coming or those in Sodom who did not know fire was about to fall. The “last days” are the last days of the old covenant order, not the last days of human history (cf. 1 Cor. 10:11; Heb. 1:1-2; 1 Pet. 1:20). “Heavens and earth” language (3:10-13) is used elsewhere in Scripture to describe not

simply the physical cosmos, but a covenantal arrangement (Isa. 51:15-16; 65:1-66:24; Jer. 4:23-31; Mt. 24:31; Heb. 12:26). Peter is describing the end of one covenantal “world” and the inauguration of a new “world.” The physical universe is in view in 3:5, but in 3:7ff he shifts to a political/covenantal world (note the contrast between the “old” heavens and earth in verse 5, and the “present” heavens and earth in verse 7). Peter mentions “the elements” (*stoichea*) which term is used elsewhere to describe the features of old creation religion (Gal. 4:3; Col. 2:8). The old covenant “elements” will be burned with fire. While Jesus began the transition from the old world to the new in his earthly ministry, that transition is not complete until AD 70. This coming regime change in history was a constant theme of the preaching of John the Baptist and Jesus, as well as the letters of Paul (e.g., Matt. 3:8-12; 13:40-42; Luke 17:24-29; 2 Thess. 1:7; Heb. 8:13).

If the impending nearness of Christ’s coming in judgment on the old world order is in view, why does Peter point out that God does not track time as we do (2 Pet. 3:9)? Is Peter saying that actually the timetable is not relevant to God? If Peter is reneging on the temporal framework that Jesus specified (within the generation of the apostles), he is playing right into the hands of the false teachers. But that is not the point. Instead, Peter argues that God is not slack *as he seems*; what *might appear* to be a long delay to us is not so to God (3:8; cf. Ps. 90:4). Further, Peter says that God’s delay is actually a sign of his gracious patience (2 Pet. 3:9; cf. 1 Pt. 3:20). God’s longsuffering is an opportunity for the false teachers to either repent and be saved, or fill up their wickedness to the full measure.

A preterist reading of these New Testament prophecies helps us understand the significance of history. Peter’s refutation of the false teachers includes a full blown philosophy of history. He describes three distinct world orders, or epochs, in history (2 Pet. 3:5ff): the world that existed from creation to flood, which “perished” in Noah’s day; the heavens and earth which are “now preserved” between the flood and the present but will soon be destroyed by fire (in AD 70); and the new covenant world, “in which righteousness dwells.” Peter demonstrates that the next new creation will not be the first new creation, but instead the culmination of a successive series of new epochs. The temple in Jerusalem was symbolic of the entire world; for the temple to be destroyed means a new world must be born.

Peter and Jude see a typological relationship between Israel’s history and the church’s history. Further, these apostles argue that the events of AD 70 will serve as a major turning point in world history. It is God’s culminating judgment on the entire pre-Christian world (Matt. 23:34-36; cf. 1 Pet. 4:7). As Jesus comes in power and glory against Jerusalem, he will definitively establish his kingdom and inaugurate a new heavens and earth. We must learn to understand history as the unfolding story of God’s redemptive purposes. The decisive chapter in that story runs from 30 to 70 AD, as Jesus ushers in his new world order.

The Centrality of the Church Community

Probably the biggest contribution of 1 Peter to a biblical worldview is in the area of ecclesiology. Peter portrays the church against the backdrop of the Old Testament narrative, showing that the church is the fulfillment of God's eschatological purposes. The church is not God's "Plan B;" it is what he has been aiming at along.

Peter is very concerned with the relationship of the Christian community to the surrounding world. Peter unfolds the church/culture relationship for an exilic situation (1 Pet. 2:11-12). Christians are not revolutionaries, but patiently await God's vindication. Christians are to engage their culture in terms of the gospel. They can be neither chameleons, blending in with the world, nor turtles, withdrawn from the world altogether. Their cultural involvement is not so much a matter of striking a balance between "sticking out" and "fitting in," as it is learning to live the *entirety* of their lives as a new nation under the lordship of Christ. The church does not merely seek to shape the world's culture; fundamentally, she lives as an alternative culture, a counter-culture, manifesting a distinct way of life that reveals God's creational and eschatological design for humanity. This counter-cultural stance is seen in the way Christians live distinctively in existing social relationships (e.g., 1 Pet. 2:11-3:7) as well as within in the church family (e.g., 1 Pet. 4:8-11). The church community both declares and demonstrates the kingdom.

Peter shows the high privileges granted to those chosen to be a part of the covenant community in the new age (1 Pet. 2:4-3:7). We are royalty, ruling over the creation in Christ. We are priests, serving in the heavenly sanctuary in the Spirit. We are a new community, manifesting the holiness and love of God in our corporate life. This high ecclesiology stands strongly against the low view of the church that has dominated modern evangelicalism. Peter would find our individualism a reprehensible distortion of the Christian life. Peter would rebuke us for privatizing our faith, rather than publicly living out the gospel before a watching world, enduring any consequent suffering for the sake of Christ.

In 1 Peter 2:4-12, the apostle gives us one of the richest descriptions of the church found in all of Scripture. The church is God's elect community, built upon the rejected-but-resurrected Christ as the living and chief cornerstone. The church is a temple of living stones, in which God dwells as his home. The church is God's royal priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices. The church is the True Israel, a holy nation, set apart as God's own special people to proclaim his wondrous works. In Peter's day, as an exiled community, the church was called to a pilgrim existence, meaning Christians had to live in the world as a robust counter-culture. In this way, their common life would be marked by honorable conduct and even Gentiles who hated the church would come to glorify God in the day of his visitation.

Peter unfolds the church's counter-cultural calling by looking at a series of social relationships (1 Pet. 2:13-3:7). Unlike the rising, rebellious Zealot movement among the unbelieving Jews, the Christians were to live in humble submission to God's ordained powers. Whereas unconverted Jews were hungry to take on the Roman establishment with the sword, the Christians were to patiently bear with Caesar's rule. Slaves and wives were often marginalized and mistreated in the ancient world, but Peter calls on them to

follow the example of Christ and suffer patiently in his name if needed (1 Pet. 2:12-3:6). Peter does not give special instructions to civil magistrates because at that point in history, it is likely that no civil rulers had embraced the gospel. But Peter does envision Christians using whatever power they have for service, rather than self-aggrandizement. This is seen in his instruction to husbands. Peter calls upon husbands to treat their wives with delicate love, and tells them that if they will not listen to their wives, God will shut his ears to their prayers as well. Peter insists that though women are different from men, they cannot be intrinsic inferiors because they are co-equal in redemption (1 Pet. 3:7). Men must treat the “weaker vessel” with honor and dignity.

1 Peter unfolds the desired, day-to-day shape of the Christian community in some detail (1 Pet. 3:8-5:9). They are to be unified, compassionate, and courteous. They should serve one another with the gifts God has provided. They must show hospitality. They should live so distinctively in the eyes of the world that their lives provoke questions to which only the gospel can be given as an answer. They should be prepared to respond those who inquire about their gospel hope in a way that honors Christ. They should live in submission to their elders in the church. They should practice humility, knowing that God will exalt them. They should cast their cares upon the Lord and resist the devil’s advances. What looks like a hodge-podge of ethical exhortations actually gives a rather well-rounded sketch of the ideal Christian community.

Prelude

A Question to Consider

The early church fathers and the Reformers used slogans like “He cannot God for his Father who does not have the church for his Mother” and “Outside of the visible church, there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.” Evaluate these slogans. What do you think Peter would say about them?

Church as “mother” is a common theme throughout church history (e.g., John Calvin’s Institutes 4.1.4). It is a way of pointing out that God uses the church’s ministries of word and sacrament to form and sustain our lives as Christians. The church is the primary place we encounter the saving presence and power of God through the means of grace. Because the church is the family of God, the Reformers taught that it is ordinarily impossible to experience salvation outside the church (Westminster Confession of Faith 25.2).

Many Christians today view the church as optional to the Christian life, so this may take some development. Perhaps using Paul’s illustration of the church as the body of Christ would be useful (1 Cor. 12). Can a hand or eyeball function properly if severed from the rest of the body? No, there is no life for individual body parts apart from the rest of the body. They must be organically joined together in order to live and function. In the same way, we are members of the body of Christ and cannot live apart from community and communion with one another.

Of course, none of this means that membership in the church saves apart from a personal response of faith. There is always the danger of hypocrisy, of attending church out of legalistic obligation rather than out of faith and love, etc. But that brings us full circle: the church is the ordinary context in which God grants and grows our faith. The church is to the Christian what water is to a fish.

Obviously, Peter's view of the church is consistent with this historic teaching on the church. Peter pictures individual Christians not as scattered pebbles but as living stones joined together into a spiritual house (1 Pet. 2:5). God dwells in the church by his Spirit. Peter says the church is the community that has received God's mercy (1 Pet. 2:10). Peter also stresses the importance of the word (1 Pet. 1:22-2:25) and sacrament (1 Pet. 3:18-22).

From the General Information above answer the following questions:

1. What role did the temple play in the religious and cultural life of Israel?

According to the Jews, the temple was the center of the world. It was the meeting place of heaven and earth because it was where God dwelt on earth. Access to God's presence in the temple was Israel's greatest privilege. The temple was not only the center of Israel's worship, but also the center of her political life because she believed that God was enthroned as King in the Most Holy Place. The temple played a major role in the economic and social life of the nation as well (e.g., money-changers, annual festivals, etc.)

2. Early church history tells us that Jewish Christians living in and around Jerusalem fled the city before Rome's final assault on the city and temple. How did they know to leave?

Jesus had instructed them about the signs leading up to the impending destruction of the temple by the Romans (Matt. 24:1-35; Luke 17:20-37). They believed the teaching of Jesus and acted accordingly.

3. Who wrote 1 and 2 Peter? Who wrote Jude? Why is identifying authorship of these books important?

These books were written by the Peter and Jude, respectively. Authorship matters because otherwise the books make claims about authorship that are not true. Furthermore, authority is tied to authorship because authority is tied to apostleship. In the case of 2 Peter, a good part of Peter's argument rests on the fact that he was an eyewitness to the Transfiguration.

4. What does 1 Peter teach us about the church?

Peter teaches that the church is the new Israel. He uses labels and categories that come from Old Testament descriptions of Israel. For example, compare 1 Peter 2:9 to Hosea 1:6, 9; 2:23.

5. 2 Peter and Jude address false teachers. Who were these false teachers and what were they teaching?

The false teachers were unbelieving Jews who attacked the teaching of Jesus and the apostles that the temple would be destroyed within a generation of Jesus' earthly ministry. The false teachers did not believe that Jesus came to establish a new covenant in which Gentiles could be included as full participants. The false teachers rejected the notion that church community herself was the new and true temple.

6. How can understanding AD 70 help you defend the Bible against those who attack its authority and accuracy?

Many theological liberals have challenged the New Testament's clear teaching that some momentous event described as the "coming" of Jesus would take place within a generation. But if we read the Scriptures properly, on their own terms, we see that the prophecies did in fact come true. So far from undermining the creditability of the Bible, explaining to skeptics the way the Bible's language works and the importance of AD 70 can actually refute their attacks.