

A Brief Defense of Authentic Peterine Authorship of 2 Peter

© 2016 by A Jacob W. Reinhardt, All Rights Reserved. Copyright holder grants permission to reduplicate article as long as it is not changed. Send further requests to jacob@ajwr.info.

Introduction

One of the more difficult issues regarding authorship in the New Testament is the Second Epistle of Peter. Carson and Moo state, “Indeed, for no other letter in the New Testament is there a greater consensus that the person who is named as the author could not, in fact, be the author.”¹ The authorship of 2 Peter is a noteworthy consideration for the student of Scripture, because issues involving authorship including the concept of pseudonymity can affect our understanding of the epistle as well as its canonicity. This paper will look at four major issues, including the epistle’s style, its genre, its date, and the early church’s evaluation of 2 Peter. It will be shown that the case against Petrine authorship is not as certain as it is supposed, and Petrine authorship will be upheld.

The Style of Second Peter

One of the first issues that meets us in 2 Peter is the issue of style. In fact, Richard Bauckham, who does not support Petrine authorship, begins his section on authorship with this statement: “The language alone...makes it improbable that Peter could have written 2 Peter.”² Nevertheless, this is not a guaranteed proof against Petrine authorship. 2 Peter features fifty-seven Greek words that are not found anywhere else in the New Testament, and some of these words are attributed to Hellenistic Jewish influences, such as Philo and Josephus.³ The reasoning, from Bauckham, is that “the author is widely read, and fond of rather literary and poetic, even obscure words.”⁴ A good example of this difference in style is the word used to refer to the Second Coming of Christ.⁵ In 1 Peter, we frequently see reference to the “revelation” of Jesus (1:7, 13; 4:13; 5:1). However, in 2 Peter we find no such use of that phraseology, instead finding usage of the “coming” of the Lord (1:16, 3:4) or the “day of the Lord” (3:10). In the end, these stylistic concerns are not as conclusive as one may be led to believe. Green points out that “[w]e simply do not possess a large enough corpus of Petrine literature to determine what Peter could or could not have written.” Additionally, it is important to not make assumptions based on Peter’s Galilean background that would rule out the possibility of Hellenistic influence on his style.⁶ The case regarding 2 Peter’s authorship is not concluded on style alone.

The Genre of Second Peter

The discussion of Second Peter’s authorship takes a somewhat unusual turn at a discussion of its genre. Today, it is widely held by scholars that this writing is not an epistle, but a testament.⁷ Richard

¹ D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd. ed., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), pg. 659.

² Richard Bauckham, *Jude and 2 Peter*, WBC (Waco: Word, 1983).

³ Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, PNTC, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), pg. 131.

⁴ Bauckham, pg. 136, quoted in Gene L. Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), pg. 144.

⁵ Green, pg. 145.

⁶ Carson and Moo, pg. 661

⁷ Green, pg. 149

Bauckham has been at the forefront of this suggestion in modern times⁸, although he was not the first to suggest it.⁹ Bauckham developed the idea that this book is of a hybrid genre, calling it a “testamentary letter.” He summarizes the components of a testament as including “(1) Ethical admonitions...[and] (2) Revelations of the future[.]”¹⁰ With that background, he gives three passages in the letter that appear to be testamentary in nature, including the homily in 1:3-11, the testamentary language in 1:12-15, and the prophecies of the future in 2:1-3a and 3:1-4. His discussion becomes extremely nuanced when he tries to account for the fact that the Jewish testament was normally fictional in nature.¹¹ My conclusion is that Bauckham’s case was not convincing. He seemed to just fit the epistolary elements into his scheme because it was convenient, without really dealing with the reality that this writing is still a letter.¹² I would prefer to state that 2 Peter is an epistle that contains testamentary elements. The fact is that even Bauckham admits that this letter is a perfect form for both a pseudographer and the authentic apostle Peter who wished to speak to people after his death.¹³ I would go farther and suggest Peter wrote a letter to people alive at the time of writing, and wished to give them some encouragement that would stay with them following his death, which he believed with coming soon. Attempts to prove that the epistle is a testament in order to rule out the possibility of Petrine authorship, sometimes apparently an assumed impossibility¹⁴, have not been successful. This is a letter with testamentary elements, but it is not a testament. As such, the genre does not exclude Petrine authorship.

The Date of Second Peter

Another means of criticism against Petrine authorship is the dating of this epistle. There is some degree of interaction between this question and all other questions about authorship. Nevertheless, four particular issues are often brought up to suggest that this epistle should be dated outside of the apostolic era, and after Peter’s death in A.D. 64-65 in particular. First, there is a striking correlation between Jude and 2 Peter, and this is sometimes used to attack Petrine authorship.¹⁵ While judgments about 2 Peter’s date on this point depend on the dating of Jude, we do not have sufficient information to make a judgment about what type of relationship exists between the two.¹⁶ As such, the literary relationship of Jude and 2 Peter does not help us settle the authorship question. The second issue regarding dating is that two elements in the letter considered to be after Peter’s time are explained to be found in the epistle, and thus proving the letter is from the second century. These two items are the identification of the false teachers as Gnostics and the suggestion that the letter acknowledges an existence of a collection of Paul’s letters in 2 Peter 3:15-16. Neither of these conclusions are settled facts. The identity of the false teachers is a matter of significant study,¹⁷ and in the end it is likely too difficult to identify who these false teachers are.¹⁸ In fact, Gene Green goes as far as to say that the identification of the false teachers as Gnostics depends on the conclusion that the letter is from the

⁸ *Jude and 2 Peter*.

⁹ W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. H. C. Kee, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973), pg. 433, cited in Green, pg. 148.

¹⁰ Pg. 131

¹¹ Bauckham, pg. 134 and surrounding.

¹² Carson and Moo, pg. 662.

¹³ Bauckham.

¹⁴ Bauckham, pg. 159.

¹⁵ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction: Hebrews to Revelation*, (Chicago: IVP, 1962), pg. 147

¹⁶ Carson and Moo, pg. 657

¹⁷ e.g. Green, pp. 150-159

¹⁸ Carson and Moo, pg. 671

second century and pseudonymous, and not the other way around.¹⁹ In similar line of thinking, the passage in 2 Peter 3 does not prove that there was a Pauline collection in existence already.²⁰ Even if it was, it almost appears that Peter is speaking of Paul as a contemporary, and thus it does not provide any evidence for a second century date. Thirdly, and most significantly to the dating issue, is the letter's numerous allusions to the apostolic generation in ways that are interpreted to refer to the apostolic generation's passing as a past event. The most notable such reference is in 3:4.²¹ On a basic level, however, it does not appear to be a valid assessment. This verse the author's prophecy of what the false teachers will say concerning the fathers. The apostle Peter under inspiration could've easily been giving a prophecy about the future. Also, Carson and Moo argue that the reference to the "fathers" could be referring to the Jewish Patriarchs.²² In the end, the arguments for dating 2 Peter outside of Peter's era are either inconclusive or not convincing.

The Church and Second Peter

A final area of discussion regarding 2 Peter and its authorship is the church and its attitudes concerning its authorship. First, there was considerable doubt about the epistle's authenticity in the early church, and we find weak attestation to the letter and significant delay in its acceptance into the canon.²³ Eusebius included it in a group of disputed writings,²⁴ and while there were some pockets at various points of acceptance into the canon, wide-spread acceptance into the canon did not start until the mid-4th century.²⁵ These concerns, however, do not require us to change our judgments about the book, as in the end it was accepted. The delay in its acceptance is merely a reflection of the same issues that concern scholars today. Second, and perhaps most importantly, the early church's attitudes about pseudonymity do not support the idea that 2 Peter should be accepted into the canon as a pseudonymous epistle. Carson and Moo provide a convincing defense of the position that pseudonymity was not something that was ever accepted by the church fathers.²⁶ Additionally, Michael Kruger has argued the very reason that 2 Peter was late to be accepted into the canon was its questionable Petrine authorship in connection with the criteria of apostolicity for canonical writings.²⁷ While it is true that apostolic authority can be found in non-apostolic authored writings²⁸, Kruger rightly argues that "it seems presumptuous to suggest that [psuedepigraphic devices] were equally acceptable when applied to epistles whose authors were considered by the early church to hold a unique authority."²⁹ The concept of pseudonymity is curiously absent for any discussions about the canonicity of this book in the early church. Even Bauckham has to admit that "[I]t was no doubt as a product of Peter's own mind that [2 Peter] was generally accepted as canonical in the end."³⁰ In conclusion, the early church's struggle over 2 Peter does not rule out the acceptance of its authentic Petrine origin and in fact the early church

¹⁹ Green, pg. 153

²⁰ Carson and Moo, pg. 659.

²¹ Bauckham.

²² pp. 661-662.

²³ See J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, HNTC (New York: Harper, 1969), pg. 224, quoted in Carson and Moo, pg. 660.

²⁴ Carson and Moo, pg. 660.

²⁵ Davids, pg. 122.

²⁶ pp. 342-344

²⁷ Michael J. Kruger, "The Authenticity of 2 Peter," *JETS* 42, no. 4 (December 1999): 646-647, accessed November 2, 2013, Theological Journal Library.

²⁸ See, for example, discussion in Arthur G. Patzia, *The Making of the New Testament: Origin, Collection, Text and Canon*, 2nd ed., (Downers Grove: IVP, 2011), pp. 168-170

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pg. 646, citing E. M. B. Green, *2 Peter Reconsidered*, (London: Tyndale, 1960), pg. 32

³⁰ *Ibid.*

does rule out the suggestion that this book should've been accepted into the canon as a pseudonymous writing.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the second epistle of Peter may be safely concluded to be an authentic Petrine epistle. The problems that lead to doubt about its origin are not insurmountable, and I believe that Petrine authorship is the better solution to those problems than a deuterio-Peter hypothesis. The style and genre of the epistle do not forbid that the epistle could've been written by Peter, as it claims. Additionally, we should not conclusively date the epistle outside of the apostolic generation, and the early church demonstrates that they too struggled with its authenticity but not that they would've accepted it into the canon as a pseudonymous writing. The epistle does have the ring of truth, and it is faithful to the apostolic teaching, and Peter's in particular. We will do well to study it alongside the rest of the New Testament and to learn from the wonderful truths that the Apostle Peter shared in it.