



Introducing the New Testament

Week 7

1



Overview of this week

- ❖ Persecution of Christians
- ❖ 1 Peter
- ❖ 2 Peter
- ❖ Jude
- ❖ Revelation

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Christians: Disturbers of the Peace

- ❖ Common misunderstanding of what it meant to be a Christian in the Roman empire in the 1st century
 - There was no empire-wide fear and persecution that drove the Christians to the catacombs and secret symbols.
- ❖ Christians had the legal right to practice their new religion, but would sometimes fall afoul of the local governor – because of public disturbances.
- ❖ What sort of public disruptions and disturbances?
 - Disruption of families
 - Fear and rumors about their “secret” rites
 - Christians refused to participate in state cults that honored the Roman gods and the worship of the Emperor.
 - Seen as a repudiation of the state! – Who is Lord??!

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Early testimonies about the Christians

- ❖ Tacitus – a Roman historian of the 1st century
 - Christianity is a “pernicious superstition.” Nero was right to use them as scapegoats because of their “hatred of the human race.”
- ❖ Suetonius – a Roman biographer (early 2nd century)
 - Christians hold to “a novel and mischievous superstition.”
- ❖ Pliny the Younger (a Roman governor)
 - Christians are “obstinate” and “mad” adherents of a “depraved superstition”

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Official Persecution

- ❖ Nero – in 64-65AD he accused the Christians of setting fire to Rome
 - They made convenient scapegoats for a fire Nero probably set himself!
 - After Nero, local persecutions increased as governors punished Christians for their refusal to worship the state gods
- ❖ Tertullian (a late 2nd century Christian)
 - "They think the Christians the cause of every public disaster . . . If the Tiber rises above the city walls . . . If there is an earthquake, if there is famine and pestilence, straightaway the cry is "Away with the Christians to the lion!"
- ❖ There was no Empire-wide persecution until about 250AD.
- ❖ Persecution of Christians continued until Constantine made Christianity the state religion in the 4th century.

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1 Peter

- ❖ Written by Peter (with help from Silvanus!) in the mid-60's. Written to encourage and instruct Christians who are being persecuted and ostracized.
- ❖ We are pretty unsure of the specific audience, though they seem to be in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey).
- ❖ Key themes to look for
 - Be the chosen and holy people of God
 - Live righteously
 - Honor even those who oppress you -- in the example of Christ's self-sacrificial love
 - Rejoice in your sufferings – "so that you may be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed" (4:13)

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1 Peter – Key Passages

- ❖ 1:3-9; The opening salvation – be thankful even in the midst of trials!
- ❖ 2:1-3; Long for spiritual nourishment – Grow!
- ❖ 2:9-12; Christians have been chosen so we can be the light to the world!
- ❖ 3:13-22; Do right, even in suffering, as Christ suffered. Be prepared to defend your faith, to give an accounting, but with gentleness and reverence.
- ❖ 4:7-11; The end is near so live like it! Use your gifts in service and love!
- ❖ 4:12-19; suffering in joy and hope

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2 Peter

- ❖ Almost certainly not written by Peter, this book was long in dispute. It was probably written very late in the 1st century.
- ❖ A call to right living – see 1:3-11
 - “For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love.” (1:5-7)
- ❖ Warnings against false teaching
- ❖ Christ will come again!
 - “But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.” (3:8-10)

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Jude

- ❖ Genuine correspondence from Jude, “a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James”
 - Jude is perhaps a half-brother of Jesus
- ❖ Written late enough for false teaching to be a big problem. Strong parallels with 2 Peter.
- ❖ Two key points
 - Christians should “contend for the faith” against false teachers. These teachers have infiltrated the churches, substituting visions & dreams for the authority of the law and Jesus’ teachings. They seem to be teaching that Christian freedom has ended the need for Jewish morality.
 - Christians are to resist the false teachings through faithful obedience and not abuse God’s grace.

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The Revelation to John

- ❖ Written as a circular letter late in the 1st century to encourage those being persecuted by Rome
 - Much harder on Rome than most of the NT letters.
- ❖ This is a book of prophecy (as in OT prophets!) and God’s word is to be kept – not some sort of secret code waiting to be cracked.
- ❖ This is pretty standard apocalyptic literature – but sometimes with a twist!
 - Very strange and weird to us, but not in the first century. Apocalyptic writing was very popular in the two centuries before and after Jesus.
 - See the last six chapters of Daniel. It is very similar “stuff” and was written about 200 years before Jesus.

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Symbols in Revelation

- ❖ Colors, numbers, animals, lampstands, buildings, plants, etc.
- ❖ The symbols are used variously
 - Sometimes the symbols are explained, sometimes, they are standard OT usage, sometimes they are details that make the vision more vivid
- ❖ The whore of Babylon in chapter 17
 - The symbols reveal – they don't conceal
- ❖ Note all the sevens!
 - Seven churches, seven angels, seven spirits, three sets of seven judgments, the Lamb has seven eyes, etc.
- ❖ 144,000 are sealed = $12 \times 12 \times 1000$
- ❖ Gematria, 666 (13:18), & *Nero redivivus*
 - Grafitti in Pompeii – “I love her whose number is 545”
 - Nero Caesar = *nron qsr* in Hebrew characters, sums to 666. Using the Latin pronunciation, we get *nro qsr*. This sums to 616, which is found in some early manuscripts!

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The Revelation – What to look for

- ❖ The opening visions of God & Christ (ch. 1)
- ❖ The messages for the seven churches (chs. 2 & 3)
- ❖ Visions of the heavenly throne room (chs. 4 & 5)
- ❖ Preliminary visions of judgment and salvation (chs. 6-11)
 - The seven seals, the 144,000, the seven trumpets
- ❖ Visions of the final judgment (chs. 12-19)
 - The woman, the dragon, the two beasts
 - Seven bowls
 - The judgment of Babylon (Rome!); ch. 17 - 19
- ❖ God's final victory!
 - Jesus – the rider on the white horse (19:11-21)
 - The final defeat of Satan (20:1-10)
 - The judgment (20:11-15)
 - The story ends well!!! The new heavens and the new earth, the new Jerusalem (chs 21 & 22)

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