

THE AUTHORSHIP OF 11 PETER

No book of the New Testament is subject to more disputes in relation to its authorship than 2 Peter. The conclusion that one draws on this question will depend largely on the bias with which he approaches the problem. The charges of the critics may be listed as follows: First, the epistle was not written by Peter because it has no attestation early enough to merit such a claim. Second, Peter could not have written it because of the style change from 1 Peter. Third, the author of the epistle very evidently leaned heavily on Jude for his material. Fourth, the difference in doctrine would indicate another author than Peter. Fifth, there seems to be sufficient evidence within the book to merit late dating of it. The combination of these arguments has placed enough doubt upon the canonicity of the book as to lead Robertson to say, "One other word needs to be said, which is that an adverse decision against the authenticity of 2 Peter stands by itself and does not affect the genuineness of the other books" (VI. 139).

The strongest argument against the book is its lack of attestation early in the history of the church. Allusions to nearly every New Testament book can be found in many of the Apostolic fathers, but this is not true in the case of 2 Peter. It is clear from the writings of Eusebius and Photius that Clement of Alexandria (died about 213 A.D.) wrote notes upon the Catholic epistles including 2 Peter. Previous to this time according to James in Cambridge Greek Testament (p. xviii) there are only three clear references to the epistle. These are in the Apology of Aristides (c. 130), the Letter of the Churches of Vienne and Lyons (c. 178), and the writings of Theophilus of Antioch (c. 185). Beyond these clear references any further evidence is subject to the viewpoint of the author. Bigg and Robertson feel that there is evident allusions to the book previous to the end of the first century, while others consider such indications inconclusive. Bigg presents a number of allusions to the phrases contained in the book and then explains them by stating, "Even scattered words and phrases . . . have a certain weight. Phrases have histories . . . they have become current, that is to say, they are constantly used by people who have not the slightest idea where they come from. The same fate may have befallen 2 Peter; . . . indeed, there is reason for thinking that the epistle did not enjoy ^{wide} circulation. Otherwise it would be difficult to account for the extremely bad state of the text" (p. 211). On the basis of such reasoning, indications of its existence can be found in Aristides, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Ignatius and Clement of Rome. Since it is a short epistle, such allusions seem to indicate that it may have been fairly well-known and the reason for its apparent lack of use stems from the fact that it is much less quotable than many of the other New Testament books.

The next major argument used against the book is the fact that the style is quite different from that of Peter's first epistle. A quite impressive list may be presented to show that this is true. Of 1,686 ἑπτάκις ἁποκρίσει in the New Testament, fifty-five of them are found in 2 Peter. This is a considerable number considering the short length of the epistle. Furthermore, 369 words are used in 1 Peter that are not found in 2 Peter, while 230 words are used in 2 Peter that are not found in 1 Peter. Only 100 words are common to both epistles. 1 Peter quotes widely from the Old Testament and alludes frequently to the Gospels while 2 Peter does not. In summing up these facts, Mayor concludes, "On the whole I should say that the difference of style is less marked than the difference in vocabulary, and that again less marked than the difference in matter, while above all stands the difference in thought, feeling, and character, in one word, of personality." (p. cv) There are several similarities to be noted in contrast to this. First, there are unusual words which the epistles have in common such as "precious", "grace and peace be multiplied", and "without spot and blameless." Second, the difference in content and the seeming urgency to warn concerning false teachers and apostasy could easily account for the difference in style and vocabulary. Bigg states concerning this, "It must be allowed that 2 Peter is not so saturated with the Old Testament as 1 Peter. But on this point great allowance must be made for the difference of subject. If a clergyman were to write two sermons, one on patience in affliction and another

on a peculiar form of Antinomian agnosticism, he would find fifty texts applicable to the former subject for one that lent itself to the latter" (p. 230). In conclusion it may be stated with Weiss, that although there is a definite difference in style, there is no other book in the New Testament as similar to 1 Peter as 2 Peter.

The third main argument is almost irresolvable and in the final analysis does not have too much bearing on the authorship of the epistle. If the book of Jude is placed in parallel column with the second chapter of 2 Peter, there is a striking resemblance in subject matter and vocabulary. There are several conclusions that may be drawn from this. If 2 Peter were written first, it would conclusively show that it was written by Peter since there is little doubt about the date and authorship of Jude. But, if 2 Peter borrows from Jude it could very easily be dated then in the second century. Robertson discusses the problem as follows: "There is rather more freshness in Jude than in 2 Peter, though 2 Peter is more intelligible. Evidently one had the other before him, besides other material. Which is the earlier? There is no way to decide this point clearly. Every point is looked at differently and argued differently by different writer" (p. 143). Bigg feels that it is possible to prove that Jude was written last, while Expositor's Greek Testament defends the opposite view. Little can be ascertained from either side and the issue can be defended equally well from either point of view.

A fourth problem raised by those who late-date the epistle is that the doctrine of the epistle is different from that of 1 Peter indicating that the author must have been different. This is the least significant of all the arguments since it is based on what one feels should have been written in contrast to what another thinks. The subject matter can easily vary according to the needs of those to whom the letter is written. In a strict analysis even those who reject the Petrine authorship such as Mayor will admit that primarily the subject matter is similar.

In the fifth place, several phrases within the book seem to indicate the fact that it should be late-dated. The mention of Paul's epistles in such a favorable and authoritative way so early in the church, (at least before Peter's death which could be dated no earlier than 64 A.D.) seems to be an anachronism. But, in the last analysis this could be considered an argument for the Petrine authorship. Paul's rebuke of Peter in Galatians would almost demand that Peter acknowledge to his followers that Paul's writings were inspired. This would save the possibility of a serious split within the church. Another such reference that is used is the statement in 3:4 that "from the day that the fathers fell asleep." On the surface this seems to say that a generation of Christians had died since Pentecost and therefore the book would have to be later than Peter's time. A careful look at the context would show that Peter is applying this to the last days, and not to the time in which he was living. Such references may be multiplied, but none of them seem to bear much weight.

There are several arguments that seem to weigh in definite favor of the Petrine authorship. First, the use of the name Simon. A forger no doubt would not have added this especially in the light of the similarity of the remainder of the salutations of the two books. Second, the use of similar words that are almost peculiar to 1 Peter indicate that Peter probably wrote both. Some of the difference in style can be accounted for by the use of a different amanuensis. Third, there is no unusual doctrine that one would expect if this were a forgery. Very seldom is such a thing done without an ulterior motive. There seems to be no such motive evident in the epistle. Third, the reference to the transfiguration $\sigma\upsilon\nu\ \sigma\upsilon\tau\omega\ \acute{\omicron}\nu\tau\omicron\varsigma$ seems to be a clear reference to the Petrine authorship. Fourth, a lesser but still significant reason would be that it was accepted in the canon. One may read the literature of later writers and not find nearly the agreement in style that this epistle has with the New Testament. Finally it may be concluded with Robertson, ". . . when all things are considered . . . that the epistle is what it professes to be by Simon Peter. Else it is pseudonymous" (p. 144).

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