

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY IN THE FIRST LETTER OF PETER –

CHAPTER TWO

In the first part of this study we began by taking time to meet the writer, Simon Peter, the leading apostle of Jesus. There is much about him in the gospels and Acts from which we are able to build a picture of him as a man. The most fascinating aspect of the study is to see two men, Peter before the Spirit came into his life on the Day of Pentecost, and Peter afterwards. They are recognisably the same personality, warm, energetic, and fearless yet the presence of the Holy Spirit transforms Peter from a proud man who was always opening his mouth at the wrong moment into a man of humility and wisdom. His own experience with Jesus, including his frequent mistakes, underlies the writing of his two letters.

Peter gives us no firm date for his letter but there are strong hints in his writing of major trouble coming soon for his readers.(I Pet.4:12) What we know from history is that in 64AD there was a disastrous fire which destroyed much of the city of Rome, believed to have been started on the orders of the Emperor Nero himself to take attention away from his incompetent administration. He blamed it on the Christians and used it as an excuse to murder them in tens of thousands. Sometimes they faced wild animals in the arena, some were tarred and set alight in the palace gardens, some were beheaded like Paul, and others were crucified like Peter. The likelihood is that Peter is writing shortly before these events to prepare the Christians, as Jesus had once prepared Peter for this time.(Jn.21:18,19) The likely place of writing is Rome itself if we understand correctly the code name Peter is using in I Pet.5:13. He was definitely in the hot seat!

In the first study you were given a series of questions on chapter one without attempting to divide the chapter up into its logical sections. Let us now go back and do this. My suggested divisions are verses 1-2; 3-9; 10-12; 13-21; 22-25. Give each section a title reflecting its theme and then try to connect the five section titles together into an overall theme for the whole chapter. Ask yourself, what was Peter's purpose in writing this first chapter? You will find it is pretty obvious.

Chapter two follows readily from the theme of the first chapter. We could divide it as follows, verses 1-3; 4-10; 11-12; 13-17; 18-25 but you are welcome to do it as seems best to you. Again choose titles based, for the moment, on your first impression. They can be improved on later when you have studied the chapter in more detail but it helps to have a general sense of where you are heading from the beginning.

Section 1 - verses 1-3

Q.1 "Therefore" takes us back to the previous chapter where Peter has been talking about being born again and what it should look like in practice. What reason has he given us for what he is about to ask of us? What are we to put aside? What do these five things have in common?

Q.2 What is the picture in the phrase 'put aside'? What are we to take in its place? How does this follow on from the illustration of 1:23? What therefore is the secret of real Christian growth?

Q.3 What gets spiritual babies started on their new diet?(Heb.6:4,5) How can we help someone else to taste Christ's kindness?

Section 2 - verses 4-10

Q.4 To what does the image now change? Where else in the New Testament has the same image been used?(I Cor.3:10-17; Eph.2:20-22) What does this picture tell us about the relationship between the Father, Son, Holy Spirit and us? And about our relationship with each other?

Q.5 What is our second role in this illustration? What are we to offer and on what terms?(Rom.12:1; Heb.13:15; Rom.15:16)

Q.6 Look up the Old Testament sources of the references in verses 6,7, and 8.(Isa.28:16; Ps.118:22; Isa.8:14) What is the context on each occasion? What idea do all three references have in common? All through these passages there is a choice; what is it? How had Peter himself learned about this choice? (Matt.16:13-18) How would understanding this help Peter's readers to face what was ahead for them?

Q.7 In verse 9 Peter uses several more Old Testament quotations this time from Isa.43:20, 61:6; Exod.19:6 and Exod.19:5 which he links together to show us God's purpose for His 'living stones'. Again look them up and consider their context. Why is each one a good reason for telling people of Jesus?

Q.8 One more Old Testament passage, Hos.1:10; 2:23 is used to spell out to us why we are in this privileged position. What is the reason?

Section 3 - verses 11-12

Q.9 Peter now begins to give examples of what our special relationship with God, described in 2:9, will look like in society, work and marriage. What is it about us that puts people off Jesus? How are we to regard ourselves that will set us free from being drawn into such behaviour? How will our new diet (2:2) help?

Section 4 - verses 13-17

Q.10 Does this section mean that we should regard whatever the government does as being automatically right? Are there circumstances when we may need to disobey our rulers? Does this passage help us to work this decision out? What did Paul say on the same topic?(Rom.13:1-7) Why might we think as Christians that we can ignore the civil law? What is the practical benefit of obeying the law of our country whenever possible? What opportunity does this give to make Jesus known?

Section 5 - verses 18-25

Q.11 How are we to treat our bosses? How again will this be a way of fulfilling 2:9? How can we endure bad treatment at work? What are we to do if the boss is cheating his customers or his workers? Is it possible for a Christian to be a trade union official? Why was it so much tougher for Peter's readers to follow this instruction than for us today? How does Jesus' death on the cross help us to handle pressures at work?