

## Reading 2 Peter as a Farewell Text

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Saying good-bye is always hard to do, but especially when the person who is leaving is about to die and there has been a deeply spiritual and personal mentoring relationship between the speaker and the associates being left behind. Such words of departure are unforgettable, searing the memories of the listeners as the speaker pours out his or her deathbed wishes, relives sacred, shared experiences, uses in-group terminology to allude to knowledge that only those people have in common, and leaves exhortations and blessing as well as warnings, counsel, and testimony. Out of such moments have come some of the most sublime passages in scripture, and it is the thesis of this paper that the Second Epistle of Peter can be seen as coming out of such a moment.

### Final Moments and Unforgettable Expressions

In ancient times, Moses called together his people, who had followed him for forty years of suffering and learning in the wilderness, as he prepared to leave them and as they prepared to cross over Jordan to enter into the promised land. Out of that final discourse came Deuteronomy 31–33, essentially Moses' last will and testament.<sup>1</sup>

When it came time for Socrates to depart from this life, he said good-bye to the students who had devoted their lives to following him, among whom was his protégé, Plato, and out of those words of farewell came one of the Socratic dialogues, the *Phaedo*, reflecting philosophically on the meaning of death, noble deaths, and life after death.

Likewise, in the Book of Mormon, Lehi gathered his sons and daughters, grandsons and granddaughters around him as he was close to death (2 Nephi 1:4; 4:12), and with all of the tenderness of a deeply concerned prophetic patriarch blessed his posterity, collectively and individually, for ages to come. Out of that setting came 2 Nephi 1–4, a foundational text for the next thousand years of Nephite history and beyond. King Benjamin’s masterful address came when he thought he was near to death (Mosiah 1:9; 2:28), although he would live for three more years serving as a co-regent with his newly crowned son Mosiah (Mosiah 6:5). But on that coronation day, anticipating his imminent departure, Benjamin left the world Mosiah 2–5, an incomparable sermon of revelation and reality, assembly and atonement, commandment and covenant.<sup>2</sup>

At the end of the Savior’s earthly ministry, on the eve of his arrest and the day before his Crucifixion, Jesus presciently gathered Peter and the other Apostles around him, men who had walked and stood by his side for three astounding years. And out of the dark hours of that Last Supper night came the words of love, assurance, warning, commandment, promise, connectivity, and high priestly blessing in John 13–17. While the Apostle John may not have written these words down until years later, those words were emblazoned in perpetuity not only on his mind, but also, as a result of his making those sacred words publicly known, upon the self-awareness of the early Christian church and, in turn, upon the fundamental definition of what it means to be a Christian.

In recent times, Latter-day Saints will remember the farewell speech of Elder Bruce R. McConkie, unveiling the knowledge and convictions that shaped his life and directed his discipleship of Christ and his apostleship to the world.<sup>3</sup> His powerful parting testimony has several things in common with the impassioned farewell speeches found in the scriptures.

Sometimes these farewell speeches are written by the one who is about to die, but other times they are recorded or composed by one of the closest associates and even the *de facto* or appointed successor. In any case, the words handed down in such farewell texts are unforgettable expressions of love and concern for dear associates. They offer a scintillating review of the most important events and lessons of the past. They disclose eternal truths and solemnly convey urgent and wise instructions. The words spoken on such occasions are remembered and recorded

not only to promote the agendas of those who promulgate the words of these departing speakers or to enhance the reputation of any immediate successors (who may even remain anonymous), but most of all to honor, highlight, and perpetuate the teachings of incomparable masters upon their departure from this mortal life. Such texts bear a special seal of veracity, coming as they do when the speaker is facing death and contemplating his or her return to face God. They speak vividly to readers, even centuries later, who can feel in such texts the spirit in which they were delivered, almost as if they were actually there.

## Typical Elements in Ancient Farewell Speeches

In approaching 2 Peter as a farewell text, the work of William Kurz is most helpful.<sup>4</sup> This scholar has analyzed twenty-two farewell speeches in the Bible and in classical Greek and Roman literature, identifying twenty elements that appear in these addresses. Farewell speeches rarely include most, let alone all, of these elements, and some features are more clearly present than others. Kurz's twelve biblical texts average about nine elements each, with a high of thirteen (with two possibly implied) and a low of one (with two implied); his ten classical texts average about four elements each, with a high of eleven and a low of one (with three implied).<sup>5</sup> Thus farewell speeches in Israelite or Jewish literature contain more such elements than speeches in Greek and Roman literature. Moreover, in the Greco-Roman literary tradition the dying speaker was usually a philosopher or statesman, whose speeches "are concerned with suicide, the meaning of death, questions about noble deaths, and life after death," whereas this preoccupation with death and dying is absent in the biblical speeches, where the speaker is a man of God and his speech typically focuses on "God's plan, people and covenant, or on theodicy and theological interpretations of history."<sup>6</sup>

Although Kurz did not analyze 2 Peter as one of his twenty-two farewell texts,<sup>7</sup> the list of elements that he has compiled can be applied very naturally to this biblical text, as our study hopes to demonstrate. Here are the twenty characteristics identified by Kurz as constituent elements of typical farewell texts, which we will then compare, side by side, with 2 Peter:

1. *Summons*: The speaker calls together or addresses his successors and followers so they can receive his last instructions.

2. *Invoking own mission as an example*: A description of the speaker's life and calling is followed by a commandment to do as he has done.

3. *Declaration of innocence and discharge of duty*: The speaker declares that he has done his best and fulfilled his obligations. He has accomplished what he intended to do and cannot be held liable for his people's actions in the future.

4. *Reference to impending death*: The announcement of the speaker's impending death does not reveal a fear of death. Rather, the speaker shows courage and an acceptance of his fate. Sometimes he commends his soul to the gods.

5. *Exhortations*: The listeners are encouraged to remember the teachings that the speaker has given before and to obey the commands that he will give during his address. The people are also counseled to have courage during times of trial or difficulty. Exhortations help to solidify the lessons of the past as well as provide comfort for the future.

6. *Warnings and final injunctions*: Warnings about disobedience and its consequences are given. There may also be warnings concerning false teachers who will try to lead the people astray. Commandments or final orders that are designed to aid the people accompany these warnings.

7. *Blessings*: Blessings are usually given in conjunction with the warnings and final orders.

8. *Farewell gestures*: The speaker may make some gesture to bid farewell, but only one of the twelve biblical addresses cited by Kurz mentions a farewell gesture. That instance occurs when Paul kneels down and prays with the disciples at the end of his speech, after which the disciples fall on his neck and kiss him (Acts 20:36–38).

9. *Specific immediate tasks for successors*: Final orders may give specific responsibilities to successors. Jesus, for example, gave final charges to the Apostles at the Last Supper (Luke 22:25–38), and David commanded Solomon to take vengeance on Joab and Shimei (1 Kings 2:5–6, 8–9).

10. *A theological review of history*: A theological review of the past is given, often telling everything from the beginning, emphasizing the guidance, protection, and chastisement of God. Moses, for example, recounted the history of Israel and acknowledged God's hand in its development in Deuteronomy 32.

11. *Revelation of future events*: Often the speaker is aware of future events that could threaten his reputation. Jesus, for instance, predicted both Judas's betrayal and Peter's denial (Luke 22:21, 34).

12. *Promises*: Biblical and Jewish farewell speeches typically promise the prospect of eternal glory. Thus both Jesus (Luke 22) and Mattathias (1 Maccabees 2) promised glory to their followers after teaching them about service, but this element does not appear in the Greco-Roman tradition.

13. *Appoints or refers to a successor*: The appointment of a successor is a very common feature of farewell speeches in the biblical tradition, and this designation

serves to legitimize the authority of the new leader. David's farewell address endorsed Solomon's leadership (1 Kings 2:1-4).

14. *Bewailing the loss*: Often the account describes the mourning of those who loved the speaker.

15. *Future degeneration is to come*: Predictions concerning future heresies and disobedience appear in farewell speeches in the biblical tradition. Such predictions transfer responsibility for adverse developments in the future from the speaker to the coming generations. Moses, for example, declared that Israel would reject the Lord and turn to idolatry.

16. *Covenant renewal (sacrifices)*: The listeners are enjoined to renew their covenant with God. Thus, David's instructions to Solomon ensured the fulfillment of David's covenant with God, and Jesus' actions at the Last Supper signaled a new covenant using bread and wine. The covenant element is unique to the biblical tradition, and in Old Testament times this would generally be accompanied by the making of sacrifices.

17. *Providing for those who will survive*: Since the followers of the aged leader will require guidance and comfort after his death, instructions are given for providing such help. Jesus' command that Peter strengthen the brethren is an example of this element.

18. *Final consolations to the inner circle*: An attempt to comfort the speaker's closest associates is often made. Jesus did this at the Last Supper when he and his most beloved followers were alone.

19. *Didactic speech*: A review of certain principles may be used to help the followers remember what they should do.

20. *Facing death*: This element relates to the leader's approach to death itself. Kurz finds this element expressly present only in the *Phaedo* and by implication in Josephus.

## Second Peter as a Farewell Text

The Second Epistle of Peter can well be seen as such a farewell text. Indeed, 2 Peter exemplifies this literary form quite remarkably and informatively. Attentive readers readily notice that 2 Peter skips around from one subject to another. In chapter 1, it seems quite personal and intimate, but in chapter 2, its mood becomes sterner and less personal. The letter as a whole sets out to accomplish several things: it shifts from one objective, such as teaching and promising, to other purposes, such as warning and stigmatizing. It seems to lack a single thesis, and its points surface almost spontaneously without always being tied logically to the subjects that precede or follow them. Thus readers may well wonder what kind of

situation holds this composition together. But of all the possible genres that might be used to situate and interpret this epistle, the farewell speech genre can best explain the presence of all of these disparate religious elements and literary features. Indeed, on such an occasion when a speaker or writer is confronting impending death, dear friends come to mind, as do shared experiences, common values, idiosyncratic vocabulary, and concerns about what may happen in the face of serious challenges looming on the horizon. These are the elements that constitute the content of 2 Peter, and analyzing this text through this lens of literary criticism helps readers appreciate the pressing concerns, the sincere messages, and the inspiring coherence of this text, as the following discussion explicates.

1. *Summons*: Simon Peter addresses his dear friends and speaks inclusively to all of them, who together “with *us*” and through “*our* Saviour Jesus Christ” have together obtained the “same” (*isotimon*, a word strongly indicating equality, not just similarity) precious faith as have the Apostles, through their collective righteousness (1:1). He speaks of the divine power that has been given “unto *us*” bestowing upon everyone in the group “all things” that will lead them to life eternal and to godly fulfillment of service to God. He reaches out and calls to his bosom all those in this group who have a testimony of Christ, who has “called” them to “glory and virtue” (1:3). These, his most cherished friends, with whom he expects to share celestial glory in the heavenly assembly, are the ones he addresses and summons to hear his words as he pours out his heart to them. Because these individuals are equal with Peter, they can be his successors and mitigate the succession problem that could arise at his death. Peter extends to his successors the greatest and most precious promises that he previously received as leader of the church (1:4).

2. *Invoking own mission as an example*: Peter’s thoughts soon turn to the purposes that he himself has tried to accomplish and to the mission that he hopes he has accomplished. He wants his people to remember the things he has taught them (1:12–13). He implores them to remember that, when he spoke to them, he properly did not follow “cunningly devised fables” or sophistic myths, but rather he and his companions set a solid example in making known to them “the power and coming of our lord Jesus Christ” and that he as an eyewitness fulfilled his mission, testifying of the Lord’s majesty (1:16). This was his all-consuming mission, as he had been commissioned by the Lord himself (Matthew 28:19; Luke 24:48; John 21:15–17; Acts 1:8).

3. *Declaration of innocence and discharge of duty*: Just as quickly as he invokes his own life as an example, Peter humbly reflects his own concerns and perhaps even some lingering insecurities, wanting to be sure that the people know that he

was innocent before them and had done everything possible to discharge his obligations and duties towards them. In his opening statement, Peter identified himself as a servant or slave (the Greek here is *doulos*, the usual word in the Roman empire for slave) as well as an Apostle, or “one sent out” (as the Greek word *apostolos* comes from the two words *apo* and *stellō*, to “send out”). In antiquity good slaves were proverbially loyal, especially when they were sent out specifically to accomplish something for their master. If ancient slaves excelled in serving their masters well, they could be freed, which in a gospel context might correspond to the freedom from spiritual death extended by Peter to all who follow the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter overtly and forthrightly declares, “I will not be negligent” but instead will certainly always remind the people of the guiding gospel principles that undergird and fully pervade the life of righteousness (1:12). His innocence is assured in that he has not promoted any false or sophistic teaching (1:16), the “sophists” typically advancing themselves and their supposed learning for money, prestige, and intellectual glory. Obviously, Peter had not promoted any such “error of the wicked” (3:17) but instead the true “knowledge of our Lord and Saviour” (3:18; also 1:5) and true “wisdom” (3:15).

4. *Reference to impending death*: Throughout this letter, Peter’s concerns are amplified because he knows, by revelation, that his death is imminent: “Knowing (*eidōs*) that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed (*edēlōsen*) me” (1:14). As a seer, Peter has seen that his death is at hand. It has been revealed and made plainly evident (*dēlos*) to him, the Greek words here indicating that he has clearly seen what is coming. Thus he turns to teaching, exhorting, and making provision for those who will survive him, assuring them that he will “endeavor . . . after my decease” to leave behind a legacy and, God willing, perhaps even his continued spiritual watchfulness over them, so that they will be able to recall all that he has taught them after his departure and decease (1:15).

5. *Exhortations*: Throughout his missive, Peter’s tone is exhortative, often using imperatives, not only inviting but stressing the urgency of following the plan of salvation: “Add to your faith” (1:5), “give diligence to” (1:10), “take heed” (1:19), “be diligent” (3:14), “account long suffering as salvation” (3:15), “beware” (3:17), and “grow” (3:18; emphases added). All of these verbs are imperative plurals. Famously, he exhorted them to “add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity” (1:5–7). Filled with charity himself, Peter hoped that these spiritual qualities would “abound” or, translated otherwise, would have an overarching presence (*hyparchonta*, 1:8) in the lives of his adherents.



6. *Warnings and final injunctions*: Knowing of these short-term and long-term predictions, Peter cannot take his leave without issuing stern warnings. He warns them of “the corruption that is in the world through lust” (1:4), of the fact that God’s judgment from long ago has not lost its force and effect and “slumbereth not” (2:3), and also that while God knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations, he reserves “the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished” (2:9). An undercurrent of warning runs throughout much of this text, clear to the end when those who wrest the scriptures are warned that they do this “unto their own destruction” (3:16). And with these perilous times ahead, a few final instructions and injunctions are also in order. Particularly, Peter enjoins the people, “Be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandments of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior” (3:2), and “beware lest ye also being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness” (3:17). Having extra patience is therefore necessary in waiting on the coming of the Lord, for “one day is with the Lord as a thousand years [is to mankind]” (3:8).

7. *Blessings*: Overwhelmed with the spirit of generosity at such a time, Peter begins by pronouncing an abundant blessing upon his people: “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord” (1:2).

8. *Farewell gestures*: As one might well expect, there would be little role for physical gestures, embraces, or ritual actions in a farewell message that is being sent to people who were not in the immediate presence of the speaker. Nevertheless, one might wonder, when Peter tells his people to be “without spot and blameless” (3:14), if he might have some ritual context in mind, for sacrificial lambs had to be “without spot” (see, for example, Numbers 28:3, 9, 11; 29:17, 26) and without “blemish” (see, for example, Numbers 6:14; 29:2, 8, 13, 20). In at least some ancient farewell addresses, the speaker shook off his garments before the people as a testimony of his innocence and as evidence that he had discharged his duty, so that he could be found without spot and stand blameless before God at the last day.

9. *Specific immediate tasks for successors*: As many farewell discourses draw to a close, their speakers often mention specific tasks that they want to be sure that their followers will not overlook. In Peter’s case, he mentions in closing the immediate tasks of remembering “what manner of persons ye ought to be in all holy conversations and godliness, looking and preparing for and hastening under the coming day of God” (3:11–12), of waiting upon the Lord for salvation with long-suffering and patience (3:15), of not “being led away with the error of the wicked”



(3:17), but rather to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (3:18).

10. *A theological review of history*: Good teachers always draw on personal experiences and ground their conclusions in reliable lessons learned from the past, and on several occasions Peter casts his mind back on his own personal experiences and also the salvation history of Israel. All of these past experiences have theological importance in binding God to mankind and heaven to earth. Peter speaks of the priesthood, which appears to be the idea behind the “divine power” (*theias dynamēōs*) unto life and godliness that he says had been given to him and others in this community (1:3). He testified of the voice of God “which came from heaven” and which he heard “when we were with him in the holy mount” (1:18). As he himself had received revelation, so also there had come prophecy “in old time,” and “not by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (1:21). But instantly, his mind turns to the fact that “there were false prophets also among the people” in past times (2:1), and that just as surely as in the premortal world “God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell” (2:4; see Genesis 6:1–4; 1 Enoch 6–10). He remembered that at the time of the Flood God “saved Noah” (2:5, a theme to which he will return to in 3:6; see Genesis 8:1–19), and in Abraham’s day he did not spare the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (2:6). However, he “rescued Lot,” who was bedeviled by the immoral behavior of the lawless (2:7; see Genesis 19:15–22), so still God knows how to spare the righteous and punish the wicked. Using the story of Balaam, who was reprimanded by his own beast of burden (2:15–16; Numbers 22:30), listeners were reminded to not forsake the right way and go astray. Peter extracted these highlights from Old Testament history to help his readers understand God’s role in history and to apply gospel principles in their lives. From his reflection on the past, Peter taught principles of humility, repentance, listening to the prophets to avoid destruction, and standing in holy places as elements of righteous living.

11. *Revelation of future events*: Reflecting his thought on the broad sweep of history and truth from the beginning to the end, Peter’s attention shifts from the past to making predictions of things to come. He prophesies that “there shall be false teachers among you,” and describes them negatively in considerable detail (2:1–3; 2:12–14). These evil spokesmen, Peter says, will bring in heresies (2:1). He predicts that “these, as natural brute beasts, shall be taken and destroyed” (2:12). He also prophesies that “there shall come in the last days scoffers, looking after their own lusts” (3:3) and refuting the promise of the Lord’s coming Christ (3:4). He foretells that fire is held in reserve “against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (3:7).

12. *Promises*: Promises are explicitly given in this parting moment, even “exceeding great and precious promises” (1:4), namely that “if these things be in you, and abound . . . ye shall neither be useless [*argous*] or unfruitful” (1:8). Other promises are given: Peter promises his audience that “if you do these things, ye shall never fall” (1:10), and that “an entrance [into the everlasting kingdom of heaven] shall be ministered unto you abundantly” (1:11). Like a light that shines in a dark place, “the day star [shall] arise in your hearts” (1:19). The Lord shall “deliver the godly from temptation” (2:9). Thus people should not doubt “the promise of his coming” (3:4), for “the Lord is not slack concerning his promises and coming” (3:9, Joseph Smith Translation). And indeed, “if we shall endure, we shall be kept according to his promise” (3:13, Joseph Smith Translation), which he has given, that there will be a “new heaven and an earth new” (3:13, quoting Isaiah 65:17; 66:22).

13. *Appoints or refers to a successor*: Although no specific designation of a successor by Peter is found in 2 Peter, he does speak very approvingly of “our beloved brother Paul” (3:14), singling him out in particular. Peter endorses the “wisdom given unto him,” that can be found in what Paul has already written to members of the church, as he has spoken in “all his epistles . . . of these things” (3:15–16). Paul, having arrived in Rome (Acts 28:16), may have worked there with Peter or with people who had been closest to Peter near his death in Rome.

14. *Bewailing the loss*: There is no sense of sorrow, lamenting, or bewailing the impending death of Peter. Whether or not the people were saddened on this occasion, as they most surely soon would be, Peter shows no remorse or regrets about his decision to return voluntarily to Rome to die. He knew that if he did not submit to the men who opposed him, they would undoubtedly turn on Peter’s followers and execute them. Peter, like Jesus and many of the Apostles, went like a lamb to the slaughter, willingly, and without opening his mouth but going forward in faith. Of Kurz’s list of twenty characteristics of a farewell speech, this is the one most obviously missing in 2 Peter, but this is understandable because this letter is not a narrative account reporting what was said and what happened just before Peter’s death and how the people reacted to it.

15. *Future degeneration is to come*: These warnings, in the mind of the one facing death, became all the more severe looking into the future. Things may be bad at the moment, but Peter is concerned that they may only degenerate and get even worse for the next generation. Peter speaks of this degeneration as he explains that the false teachers will go from bad to worse, becoming not only false and wrong, but presumptuous, self-willed, blasphemers, like “natural brute beasts,” indulgent, deceivers, adulterers, beguilers, and covetous. They are catastrophically doomed

“cursed children” (2:10–14). Of them it is said, “It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness” and then to have turned against it (2:21).

16. *Covenant renewal (sacrifices)*: Although other farewell speakers will take time at the end of their speech to actually renew covenants with their people, Peter did not enjoy that luxury, at least not within the ambit of this letter. Nevertheless, it seems that Peter was still strengthened by his knowledge of God’s covenants, for he speaks often of “remembrance,” using either the word *hupomnēsei* or *mnēmēn* (1:12, 13, 15, 3:1, 2). This is reminiscent of the words Paul used in telling the Corinthians to “remember” (*memnēsthe*; 1 Corinthians 11:2) to follow him and the ordinances, and to partake of the sacramental bread and wine in “remembrance” (*anamnēsin*; 11:24–25). Perhaps the allusion to Noah being saved (2:5) refers to the covenant between God and Noah and consequently with all people, and the rescue of Lot (2:7) may have been remembered because it had to do with the covenant God made with Abraham regarding Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:32; 19:21). Through Peter’s statements to “be mindful of the commandment” (3:2) and that “all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (3:4), his followers were effectively reminded to keep their covenants. The term “grace” (*charis*), mentioned in Peter’s final verse (3:18), also has covenantal overtones, because it and its Greek cognates generally refer to a reciprocal, albeit asymmetrical, covenant relationship between two willing parties bound to each other.<sup>8</sup>

17. *Providing for those who will survive*: Peter makes no worldly provisions in this epistle for his successors, but he cares fully for their spiritual well-being. Peter made this statement to his readers so that “all should come to repentance” because God “is not willing that any should perish” (3:9). Peter also gives renewed assurances that nothing has changed regarding the promises and covenants of the Lord, that he will come even “as a thief in the night” (3:10; quoting Paul’s phrase in 1 Thessalonians 5:2), and, ultimately, that God will provide according to his promise “new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (3:13).

18. *Final consolations to the inner circle*: Likewise, Peter’s consolation to his children in the gospel comes in terms of testimonies of reassurance: “We have also a more sure word of prophecy” (1:19; compare D&C 131:5); he calls them his “dearly beloved” (3:1, 14, 17) and assures them that all will be well if “all should come to repentance” (3:9) and that with diligence and endurance “ye may be found of him in peace” (3:14). Christ’s Atonement brings about salvation from physical and spiritual death and victory over all one’s enemies. This salvation occurs because of the Atonement, which makes eternal life and exaltation possible. Peter testifies that in “the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation” (3:14–15).

Through the gift of the Savior's Atonement, Peter's associates are able to receive consolation at his passing.

19. *Didactic speech*: The exhortations in 2 Peter are given with clear didactic explanations and practical instructions. Peter, always a teacher but now giving his final message, proclaims and expounds the principles of the gospel. He does this in several ways. He shows the progression that builds from faith to virtue, to knowledge, to temperance, to patience, to godliness, to brotherly kindness, and to charity (1:5–7). He explains how Jesus received his majesty, “for he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’” (1:16–17).<sup>9</sup> He teaches the primary principle “that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation” (1:20, clarified in the Joseph Smith Translation to read “no prophecy of the scriptures is given of any private will of man”). Peter punctuates his warning with the wise adage that “by whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought into bondage” (2:19). He explicates this point, declaring that it would have been better for rebellious apostates had they not “known the way of righteousness, then, after they had known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them” (2:21). He buttresses his teaching with the axiom from Proverbs 26:11 that “the dog has turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire” (2:22). Before concluding, he offers good learning advice when confronted with some things that are “hard to be understood” or that seem counterintuitive to those who are “unlearned and unstable” or untaught or not well grounded; his subjects are counseled not to twist or distort or “wrest” the teachings of inspired leaders (3:16).

20. *Facing death*: Approaching death, Peter does not become sorrowful or morose, as Greek and Roman farewell speakers often did. Instead, he speaks not of death but of the “divine power” that gives “unto us all things that pertain unto life” (1:3). Projecting his faith in the life to come, Peter looks to the day when his people “may be found” by God to be “without spot, and blameless” (3:14), in the presence of his glory in the world to come.<sup>10</sup>

## Concluding Observations

First, it seems clear that 2 Peter fits the mold of a farewell speech or text. Seen at the molecular level, nineteen of the individual elements of a classic farewell speech are significantly detectable in 2 Peter, which is considerably stronger than any other instance of this genre previously identified. Moreover, seen at the thematic level, all of the subjects raised sequentially in 2 Peter come into sharper focus and appreciation as one sees these nineteen elements playing their various roles in every

section of the text. As a full complement of bright threads woven into the fabric of this text, these correlations corroborate the strength and validity of this reading. Section by section, 2 Peter personally speaks and gives promises to those who are prepared to advance (Kurz, nos. 1, 2, 12; see 2 Peter 1:1–4), didactically articulates and exhorts the Saints to build on the foundations of righteousness (nos. 5, 12, 19; see 2 Peter 1:5–9), and in turn introduces the ultimate goal of true Christians, namely to know with assurance of one’s calling and election (nos. 5, 19; see 2 Peter 1:10–11). Peter then bears his personal and covenantal witness, even as he prepares to die (nos. 2, 4, 16, 20; see 2 Peter 1:12–15), that true knowledge has been and is revealed by the voice of God (nos. 2, 3, 10, 19; see 2 Peter 1:16–21). He then warns his readers that false teachers will intrude among them (no. 6; see 2 Peter 2:1–3a), but explains why God willingly delays the looming punishment (no. 6, 10, 11; see 2 Peter 2:3b–9). In considerable detail, he reveals and historically documents the telltale sins and signs of false teachers, and he prophesies about the doom that will befall them (nos. 10, 11, 15, 19; see 2 Peter 2:10–22). Comforting and reassuring his beloved followers, he exhorts them to remember their testimonies and commitments (nos. 5, 6, 16; see 2 Peter 3:1–2) and helps them to understand that just as God willingly delays the punishment of the wicked, he also willingly delays the Second Coming (nos. 11, 17; see 2 Peter 3:3–9). Ending faithfully and positively, he encourages them to prepare for the coming day of the Lord (nos. 9, 17; see 2 Peter 3:10–13), to be patient and understanding, following the wisdom of Paul (nos. 5, 6, 8, 13, 17, 20; see 2 Peter 3:14–16), and finally, assured that they have been taught, he assigns them to be on guard and increase their spirituality (nos. 3, 9; see 2 Peter 3:17–18). Thus not only does the content of this letter clearly communicate important gospel truths, but also these points are conveyed with literary elegance, rhetorical effect, and spiritual power, which one feels by reading this poignant epistle through Peter’s eyes, as he sees beyond the veil of mortality and into the realm of God’s “glory, both now and for ever” (3:18).

Second, this analysis of 2 Peter as a farewell speech offers a stronger way to read this text than other options that have been proposed. For example, in 1983 (two years before Kurz articulated the profile of the farewell speech), Richard Bauckham proposed that 2 Peter should be seen as belonging to the late Hellenistic genre of testamentary literature.<sup>11</sup> However, more recent commentators on 2 Peter have concluded that 2 Peter fits only loosely into the testamentary category, having little in common with works such as the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs or the Testament of Job.<sup>12</sup> As Peter Davids concludes, “Bauckham has not shown that it *obviously* would have been read [as testamentary literature] by *most* readers.”<sup>13</sup> Likewise, considering 2 Peter simply to be an

“epistle”<sup>14</sup> is not very satisfying, because epistles in antiquity had many uses and were directed to very diverse audiences for different purposes, and thus this designation has not proven to help much in appreciating or interpreting 2 Peter’s notable teachings. Certainly, 2 Peter has little in common with other ancient epistles that were commonly exchanged in antiquity between friends (Atticus and Cicero), government leaders (Pliny and Trajan), church officials (Augustine or Jerome and their many associates), or congregations (the Apostle Paul) that were often transmitted around the Mediterranean by networks of loyal slaves. As Davids observes, 2 Peter clearly starts out as a letter, but “after the greeting there are no more letter characteristics.” It lacks a thanksgiving section, and in the conclusion “there are no personal greetings or references to the letter carrier. . . . Thus, while it was composed to be sent as a letter, the work is not at its core a letter, but more a sermon or speech within a letter structure.”<sup>15</sup>

Instead, 2 Peter appears to follow the literary form of a speech. Not only does it contain “deliberative rhetoric with imbedded sections of judicial (1:16–2:10a; 3:1–13) and epideictic rhetoric (2:10b–22),”<sup>16</sup> but it follows the typical elements of a classical speech—namely, after the introductory salutation (which is not normally part of a speech), there is an *exordium* (introductory statement of purpose and call for attention, 1:3–15), a *probatio* (defense of the thesis, 1:16–3:13), which includes a *digressio* (excursus, 2:10b–22) and a *transitio* (resumption after the digression, 3:1–2), concluding with a *peroratio* (recapitulation and final wishes, 3:14–18).<sup>17</sup> Thus behind 2 Peter there indeed stands a speech of some sort, and as the foregoing analysis has shown, that speech was more than just a regular speech. It was a farewell speech,<sup>18</sup> and “there is no reason to suppose that a first century reader would recognize 2 Peter as different in genre from the type of farewell speech found in Acts.”<sup>19</sup>

Third, closely related to the question of literary genre is the query “Does this literary analysis shed any light on the perplexing question of the authorship of 2 Peter?” People have puzzled for centuries over the question of the authorship of this book in the New Testament, and scholarship and historical tools have been unable to resolve these issues to everyone’s satisfaction.<sup>20</sup> “Both sides on the issue of authorship face problems that are difficult to explain.”<sup>21</sup> “There is in the end no conclusive way to respond”<sup>22</sup> to these issues. One cannot prove that Peter did write it, nor that he did not. While this is not the place to discuss the critical arguments concerning the authorship of 2 Peter, seeing it as a farewell speech may make a valuable contribution to this investigation. Seeing 2 Peter this way adds weight to the circumstantial case in favor of its authenticity as Peter’s final communication, in several ways:



Literarily, innate elements of the farewell genre make it an unlikely genre to be used by a forger. A forger is unlikely to have sensed from ordinary experience, let alone from the usual awareness of ancient literature, the full profile of farewell speeches manifested in 2 Peter.

Intuitively, if one wanted to write a pious pseudonymous text, which was done often enough in the ancient world, an ordinary letter or a routine narrative would be much safer to pen than a near-death farewell message. Moreover, one might think that a forger would have designed the text to be more like a familiar farewell speech of Socrates or Moses, thus capitalizing on the esteem that would come by association with some other famous person, but this was not done. In addition, a forger intentionally mimicking the farewell speech genre might well have given a more detailed drama of the impending death, but that also was not done.

Socially, parting testimonies were poignant group experiences, making it hard to imagine that such a text could be fabricated. People who were there or knew of the circumstances and who were bonded together in the cause of carrying forward the mission of the Master would have been in a position to repudiate such a text.

Practically, just as Socrates did not write his farewell speech but was fortunate to have Plato, his successor, write down the essence, if not the verbatim speech given by Socrates before he drank the hemlock, Peter too would have been unlikely to sit down at such a time and pen a letter to his friends. The use of a scribe would have been normally expected.

Compositionally, writing a whole letter from scratch in such a moment would normally be too much to expect, and this may explain why Peter drew on the words of Jude on this occasion, as most scholars agree 2 Peter does.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps Peter had even used Jude before in speaking to his people, and thus the incorporation of these already familiar words into his farewell speech would have seemed perfectly appropriate to them.

Personally, since Peter was present at the Last Supper and heard Jesus give his words of farewell before leaving for Gethsemane and Golgotha, and since Peter typically tried to follow his Master's example in as many ways as he could, Peter may well have wanted to follow Jesus' example in this way too, bidding farewell to his followers when the time came time for him to go back into Rome, according to the early Christian tradition, also to be crucified.<sup>24</sup>

In any event, for many reasons, 2 Peter rings true. At such a time, Peter would have wanted, if at all possible, to speak personally and sincerely to all of his followers, seen and unseen, as he said good-bye one last time. He would have been



grateful, as we are today, for the scribe who took down Peter's words, as best he could, to memorialize the final message of this indomitable apostolic leader.

Finally, from a distinctively Latter-day Saint point of view, seeing 2 Peter as a farewell text strikes a common chord in the life and ministry of the Prophet Joseph Smith. He was deeply impressed by this letter. Three times in one week in 1843, the Prophet Joseph spoke about the Second Epistle of Peter on Sunday, May 14, in Yelrome, Hancock County; on Wednesday, May 17, in Ramus, Illinois; and on Sunday, May 21, in Nauvoo.<sup>25</sup> During that week, on May 17, the Prophet Joseph said that "Peter penned the most sublime language of any of the apostles,"<sup>26</sup> making it clear that he was thinking of 2 Peter when he made this comment. *A propos* the farewell topic of the present study, it may well be that Joseph's sensitivity to the sublime nature of 2 Peter can be attributed to the fact that Peter was facing death as he fashioned these words, just as Joseph Smith knew, even in 1843, that his time was getting short. As he drew closer to the looming martyrdom, his speeches—in particular his orations about the mission and sealing power of Elijah (August 27, 1843; January 21 and March 10, 1844),<sup>27</sup> and his speeches at the funerals of Elias Higbee (August 13, 1843, quoting 2 Peter 3:10–11),<sup>28</sup> James Adams (October 9, 1843),<sup>29</sup> and King Follett (April 7, 1844),<sup>30</sup> and his discourses about the Resurrection, eternal judgment, and eternal glories (April 6 and June 16, 1844)<sup>31</sup>—focused, like Peter, on such themes as the divine nature, the purpose of existence, facing and overcoming death, the coming of the day of reckoning as a thief in the night, warnings, salvation for the dead, covenants, the sealing power, and eternal life. In the face of death and hell, we find sublimely refined statements and elevated doctrines of eternal life that reach, in the final words of both Peter and of Joseph Smith, beyond this mortal sphere.

## Notes

1. See also the farewells of Joshua (Joshua 23–24), of David (1 Kings 2:1–10; 1 Chronicles 28–29), and of Samuel (1 Samuel 12:1–25).

2. For a full discussion, see John W. Welch and Daryl R. Hague, "Benjamin's Sermon as a Traditional Ancient Farewell Address," in *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom,"* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 89–118.

3. Bruce R. McConkie, "The Purifying Power of Gethsemane," *Ensign*, May 1985, 9, reprinted in *Ensign*, April 2011, 56–59. In this speech, several elements of the farewell speech genre can be found: a declaration of having discharged his duty, a reference to impending death, a theological review of the past, exhortations, didactic encouragement,

pronouncing of blessings, and frequent reference to the atoning and covenantal sacrifice of the Savior.

4. William S. Kurz, "Luke 22:14–38 and Greco-Roman Biblical Farewell Addresses," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104 (1985): 251–68; and William S. Kurz, *Farewell Addresses in the New Testament* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990).

5. Kurz, "Farewell Addresses," 262–63.

6. Kurz, "Farewell Addresses," 261.

7. Some New Testament scholars, including Kurz, have acknowledged that 2 Peter fits into the ancient farewell speech form generally, although it has not been analyzed in detail as such. Kurz describes 2 Peter not as a "farewell speech," but as a "farewell letter" similar to 2 Timothy, because both of these letters exist outside a narrative context, unlike the farewell speeches of Paul in Acts 20 and the words of Jesus in Luke 22 and John 13–17. See Kurz, *Farewell Addresses in the New Testament*, 9.

8. See generally, James R. Harrison, *Paul's Language of Grace in Its Graeco-Roman Context* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); Gerald W. Peterman, *Paul's Gift from Philippi: Conventions of Gift-Exchange and Christian Giving* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Brent J. Schmidt, *Obliging Grace* (forthcoming).

9. Literally, the earliest Greek papyrus of 2 Peter 2:17 and *Codex Vaticanus* read "The son mine, the beloved of me, this is, in whom I am well pleased," but most other Greek manuscripts read the same as Matthew 3:17 and 17:5.

10. The benediction at the end of Jude 1:24–25, which was known to Peter as well as to his audience, expresses a similar wish: to be found without fault or blameless (*amōmous*, the same word as in 2 Peter 3:14), which wish in Jude clearly refers to standing "before the presence of [God's] glory" in the world to come.

11. A pseudepigraphical text is one written by one author but attributed to an earlier illustrious individual. Texts that report lengthy deathbed pronouncements naturally seem to be strong candidates to have been written by someone other than the aged decedent. Richard Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983). Bauckham makes an argument for 2 Peter fitting into the larger testamentary genre throughout his lengthy and learned commentary. See also Scot McKnight, "2 Peter," in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, ed. James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 1504.

12. Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and of the Epistle of Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987); Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006). Throughout his commentary Davids argues that Bauckham's model of the testamentary genre does not fit 2 Peter or even the testamentary literature that Bauckham uses as models. For these and other testaments, such as the Testaments of Adam, Abraham, Moses, and Solomon, see James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigraph*, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 1:773–995.

13. Peter Davids, *Letters of 2 Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 148.

14. Ancient letters include "records of business transactions, official reports of little people to big government, and above all, private letters between individuals." Howard Clark Kee, *The New Testament in Context: Sources and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984), 204. See generally, Hans-Josef Klauck, *Ancient Letters and the*

*New Testament: A Guide to Content and Exegesis* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006). “To some extent, the three species of rhetoric—judicial, deliberative, and epideictic—can also be used to classify epistles, . . . [but there is] nothing close to complete conformity.” David E. Aune, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 173.

15. Davids, *Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, 143.

16. Davids, *Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, 143; commenting on Duane Frederick Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style: Rhetorical Criticism of Jude and 2 Peter* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 85–86.

17. Davids, *Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, 143–44, drawing on the works of Neyrey, Bauckham, and Watson.

18. “Thus our conclusion is that Bauckham has shown that 2 Peter is a farewell speech.” Davids, *Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, 148.

19. Davids, *Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, 143.

20. Commentaries on 2 Peter routinely cover the authorship question, often coming to much this same conclusion. See, for example, Daniel Keating, *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture: First and Second Peter, Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 127–29; Ruth Anne Reese, *Two Horizons New Testament Commentary: 2 Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 115–21; Davids, *Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, 123–30; Kistemaker, *Epistles of Peter*, 213–19; PHEME Perkins, *First and Second Peter, James, and Jude* (Louisville: John Knox, 1995), 159; see generally, F. Lapham, *Peter: The Myth, the Man and the Writings* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 149–71.

21. Kistemaker, *Epistles of Peter*, 219.

22. Davids, *Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, 129. “Both sides on the issue of authorship face problems that are difficult to explain.”

23. Most scholars agree that 2 Peter is quoting Jude, because this solution can explain the differences between 2 Peter and Jude in several ways. There is a consistency in 2 Peter’s editing of Jude: “He adds the point of view that the teachers he opposes were at one time true members of the community; he removes direct references to *1 Enoch* and the *Testament of Moses*; he also simplifies some of Jude’s examples by not taking over all three examples that are in some of Jude’s groups of three. Finally he drops the ending of Jude (although aspects show up in his own closing) and instead integrates the last part of Jude before the ending of his own apologetic for the capital Parousia.” Davids, *Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, 142.

24. Peter beseeched his executioners to crucify him “with the head downward,” to form a likeness of Adam who “fell (was borne) head downwards,” who “cast his first state down upon the earth,” and thereby revealed a mystery that things “that are above” must be made “as those below, and those that are behind as those that are before,” as the mystery of the cross and of the gospel of Jesus Christ inverts the world’s expectations in many ways. Acts of Peter, 37–38, in Montague Rhodes James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 334–35.

25. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1980), 200–209.

26. Discourse and Revelation (D&C 131:5–6), William Clayton Journal, May 17, 1843, Church History Library. See also Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 202.

27. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 243–48; 317–18; 327–36.
28. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 238–42.
29. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 252–55.
30. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 340–62.
31. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 339–40; 378–83.

