

The Second Epistle of

PETER



THE BOOK OF 2 PETER

First Peter deals with problems from the outside; 2 Peter deals with problems from the inside. Peter writes to warn the believers about the false teachers who are peddling damaging doctrine. He begins by urging them to keep close watch on their personal lives. The Christian life demands diligence in pursuing moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and selfless love. By contrast, the false teachers are sensual, arrogant, greedy, and covetous. They scoff at the thought of future judgment and live their lives as if the present would be the pattern for the future. Peter reminds them that although God may be longsuffering in sending judgment, ultimately it will come. In view of that fact, believers should live lives of godliness, blamelessness, and steadfastness.

The statement of authorship in 1:1 is very clear: “Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ.” To distinguish this epistle from the first by Peter it was given the Greek title *Petrou B*, “Second of Peter.”



THE AUTHOR OF 2 PETER

No other book in the New Testament poses as many problems of authenticity as does 2 Peter. Unlike 1 Peter, this letter has very weak external testimony, and its genuineness is hurt by internal difficulties as well. Because of these obstacles, many scholars reject the Petrine authorship of this epistle, but this does not mean that there is no case for the opposite position.

External Evidence: The external testimony for the Petrine authorship of 2 Peter is weaker than that for any other New Testament book, but by the fourth century it became generally recognized as an authentic work of the apostle Peter. There are no undisputed second-century quotations from 2 Peter, but in the third century it is quoted in the writings of several church fathers, notably Origen and Clement of Alexandria. Third-century writers were generally aware of 2 Peter and respected its contents, but it was still cataloged as a disputed book. The fourth century saw the official acknowl-

edgment of the authority of 2 Peter in spite of some lingering doubts. For several reasons 2 Peter was not quickly accepted as a canonical book: (1) Slow circulation kept it from being widely known. (2) Its brevity and contents greatly limited the number of quotations from it in the writings of early church leaders. (3) The delay in recognition meant that 2 Peter had to compete with several later works that falsely claimed to be Petrine (e.g., the Apocalypse of Peter). (4) Stylistic differences between 1 and 2 Peter also raised doubts.

Internal Evidence: On the positive side, 2 Peter bears abundant testimony to its apostolic origin. It claims to be by “Simon Peter” (1:1), and 3:1 says “Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle.” The writer refers to the Lord’s prediction about the apostle’s death in 1:14 (cf. John 21:18, 19) and says he was an eyewitness of the Transfiguration (1:16–18). As an apostle (1:1), he places himself on an equal level with Paul (3:15). There are also distinctive words that are found in 2 Peter and in Peter’s sermons in Acts, as well as unusual words and phrases shared by 1 and 2 Peter.

On the negative side, a number of troublesome areas challenge the traditional position: (1) There are differences between the style and vocabulary of 1 and 2 Peter. The Greek of 2 Peter is rough and awkward compared to that of 1 Peter, and there are also differences in informality and in the use of the Old Testament. But these differences are often exaggerated, and they can be explained by Peter’s use of Silvanus as his secretary for 1 Peter and his own hand for 2 Peter. (2) It is argued that 2 Peter used a passage from Jude to describe false teachers and that Jude was written after Peter’s death. However, this is a debated issue, and it is possible that Jude quoted from Peter or that both used a common source (see “The Author of Jude”). (3) The reference to a collection of Paul’s letters (3:15, 16) implies a late date for this epistle. But it is not necessary to conclude that all of Paul’s letters were in mind here. Peter’s contact with Paul and his associates no doubt made him familiar with several Pauline Epistles. (4) Some scholars claim that the false teaching mentioned in 2 Peter was a form of Gnosticism that emerged after Peter’s day, but there is insufficient evidence to support this stand.

The alternative to Petrine authorship is a later forgery done in the name of Peter. Even the claim that 2 Peter was written by a disciple of Peter cannot overcome the problem of misrepresentation. In addition 2 Peter is clearly superior to any pseudonymous writings. In spite of the external and internal problems, the traditional position of Petrine authorship overcomes more difficulties than any other option.



THE TIME OF 2 PETER

Most scholars regard 3:1 (“Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle”) as a reference to 1 Peter. If this is so, Peter had the same readers of Asia Minor in mind (see “The Time of 1 Peter”), although the more general salutation in 1:1 would also allow for a wider audience. Peter wrote this epistle in response to the spread of heretical teachings which were all the more insidious because they emerged from within the churches. These false teachers perverted the doctrine of justification and promoted a rebellious and immoral way of life.

This epistle was written just before the apostle’s death (1:14), probably from Rome. His martyrdom took place between A.D. 64 and 66 (if Peter were alive in A.D. 67 when Paul wrote 2 Timothy during his second Roman imprisonment, it is likely that Paul would have mentioned him).



THE CHRIST OF 2 PETER

Apart from the first verse of his epistle, Peter employs the title “Lord” every time he names the Savior. The Lord Jesus Christ is the source of full knowledge and power for the attainment of spiritual maturity (1:2, 3, 8; 3:18). Peter recalls the glory of Jesus’ transfiguration on the holy mountain and anticipates His *parousia*, “coming,” when the whole world, not just three men on a mountain, will behold His glory.



KEYS TO 2 PETER

Key Word: Guard Against False Teachers—The basic theme that runs through 2 Peter is the contrast between the knowledge and practice of truth versus falsehood. This epistle is written to expose the dangerous and seductive work of false teachers, and to warn believers to be on their guard so that they will not be “led away with the error of the wicked” (3:17). It is also written to exhort the readers to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (3:18), because this

growth into Christian maturity is the best defense against spiritual counterfeits. This letter serves to remind its readers of the foundational elements in the Christian life from which they must not waver (1:12, 13; 3:1, 2). This includes the certainty of the Lord’s return in power and judgment.

Key Verses: 2 Peter 1:20, 21 and 3:9–11—“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit” (1:20, 21).

“The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of *persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness” (3:9–11).

Key Chapter: 2 Peter 1—The Scripture clearest in defining the relationship between God and man on the issue of inspiration is contained in 1:19–21. Three distinct principles surface: (1) that the interpretation of Scriptures is not limited to a favored elect but is open for all who “rightly [divide] the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15); (2) that the divinely inspired prophet did not initiate the Scripture himself; and (3) that the Holy Spirit (not the emotion or circumstances of the moment) moved holy men.



SURVEY OF 2 PETER

Peter wrote his first epistle to encourage his readers to respond properly to external opposition. His second epistle focuses on internal opposition caused by false teachers whose “destructive heresies” (2:1) can seduce believers into error and immorality. While 1 Peter speaks of the new birth through the living Word, 1 Peter stresses the need for growth in the grace and knowledge of Christ. The best antidote for error is a mature understanding of the truth. Second Peter divides into three parts: cultivation of Christian character (1); condemnation of false teachers (2); and confidence of Christ’s return (3).

Cultivation of Christian Character (1): Peter’s salutation (1:1, 2) is an introduction to the major theme of chapter 1, that is, the true knowledge of Jesus Christ. The readers are reminded of the “great and precious promises” that are theirs because of their calling to faith in Christ (1:3, 4). They have been called away from the corruption of the

world to conformity with Christ, and Peter urges them to progress by forging a chain of eight Christian virtues from faith to love (1:5–7). If a believer does not transform profession into practice, he becomes spiritually useless, perverting the purpose for which he was called (1:8–11).

This letter was written not long before Peter's death (1:14) to remind believers of the riches of their position in Christ and their responsibility to hold fast to the truth (1:12–21). Peter knew that his departure from this earth was imminent, and he left this letter as a written legacy. As an eyewitness of the life of Christ (he illustrates this with a portrait of the Transfiguration in 1:16–18), Peter affirms the authority and reliability of the prophetic word. The clearest biblical description of the divine-human process of inspiration is found in 1:21: "but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit."

Condemnation of False Teachers (2): Peter's discussion of true prophecy leads him to an extended denunciation of false prophecy in the churches. These false teachers were especially dangerous because they arose within the church and undermined the confidence of believers (2:1–3). Peter's extended description of the characteristics of these false teachers (2:10–22) exposes the futility and corruption of their strategies. Their teachings and lifestyles reek of arrogance and selfishness, but their crafty words are capable of enticing immature believers.

Confidence of Christ's Return (3): Again Peter states that this letter is designed to stir up the minds of his readers "by way of reminder" (3:1; cf. 1:13). This very timely chapter is designed to remind them of the certain truth of the imminent *parousia* (this Greek word, used in 3:4, 12, refers to the second coming or advent of Christ) and to refute those mockers who will deny this doctrine in the last days. These scoffers will claim that God does not powerfully intervene in world affairs, but Peter calls attention to two past and one future divinely induced catastrophic events: the Creation, the Flood, and the dissolution of the present heavens and earth (3:1–7). It may appear that the promise of Christ's return will not be fulfilled, but this is untrue for two reasons: God's perspective on the passing of time is quite unlike that of men, and the apparent delay in the *parousia* is due to His patience in waiting for more individuals to come to a knowledge of Christ (3:8, 9). Nevertheless, the day of consummation will come, and all the matter of this universe will evidently be transformed into energy from which God will fashion a new cosmos (3:10–13).

In light of this coming day of the Lord, Peter exhorts his readers to live lives of holiness, steadfastness, and growth (3:14–18). He mentions the letters of "our beloved brother Paul" and significantly places them on a level with the Old Testament Scriptures (3:15, 16). After a final warning about the danger of false teachers, the epistle closes with an appeal to growth, and a doxology.

OUTLINE OF 2 PETER

I. Cultivation of Christian Character . . .	1:1–21		
A. Salutation	1:1, 2		
B. Growth in Christ	1:3–14		
C. Grounds of Belief	1:15–21		
1. Experience of the Transfiguration	1:15–18		
2. Certainty of the Scriptures	1:19–21		
II. Condemnation of False Teachers	2:1–22		
		A. Danger of False Teachers	2:1–3
		B. Destruction of False Teachers	2:4–9
		C. Description of False Teachers	2:10–22
		III. Confidence of Christ's Return	3:1–18
		A. Mockery in the Last Days	3:1–7
		B. Manifestation of the Day of the Lord.	3:8–10
		C. Maturity in View of the Day of the Lord.	3:11–18

CHAPTER 1

Salutation

SIMON Peter, a bondservant and ^aapostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who have ¹obtained ^blike² precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:

2 ^aGrace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord,

Growth in Christ

3 as His ^adivine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him ^bwho called us by glory and virtue,

4 ^aby which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be ^bpartakers of the divine nature, having escaped the ¹corruption *that is* in the world through lust.

5 But also for this very reason, ^agiving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue ^bknowledge,

6 to knowledge self-control, to self-control ¹perseverance, to perseverance godliness,

7 to godliness brotherly kindness, and ^ato brotherly kindness love.

8 For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither ¹barren ^anor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

9 For he who lacks these things is ^ashort-sighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.

10 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent ^ato make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble;

11 for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

12 For this reason ^aI will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, ^bthough you know and are established in the present truth.

13 Yes, I think it is right, ^aas long as I am in this ¹tent, ^bto stir you up by reminding you,

14 ^aknowing that shortly I *must* ¹put off my tent, just as ^bour Lord Jesus Christ showed me.

Experience of the Transfiguration

Matt. 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35

15 Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my ¹decease.

16 For we did not follow ^acunningly devised fables when we made known to you the ^bpower and ^ccoming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were ^aeyewitnesses of His majesty.

17 For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: ^a“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

1:1 ^aGal. 2:8 ^bEph. 4:5 ¹received
²faith of the same value

1:2 ^aDan. 4:1

1:3 ^a1 Pet. 1:5

^b1 Thess. 2:12;

2 Thess. 2:14;

1 Pet. 5:10

1:4 ^a2 Cor. 1:20; 7:1

^b[2 Cor. 3:18]

¹depravity

1:5 ^a2 Pet. 3:18

^b2 Pet. 1:2

1:6 ¹patience

1:7 ^aGal. 6:10

1:8 ^a[John 15:2]

¹useless

1:9 ^a1 John 2:9–11

1:10 ^a2 Cor. 13:5;

1 John 3:19

1:12 ^aPhil. 3:1; 1 John

2:21; Jude 5

^b1 Pet. 5:12

1:13 ^a[2 Cor. 5:1, 4];

2 Pet. 1:14 ^b2 Pet.

3:1 ¹Body

1:14 ^a[2 Cor. 5:1;

2 Tim. 4:6] ^bJohn

13:36; 21:18, 19 ¹Die

and leave this body

1:15 ¹Lit. *exodus,*

departure

1:16 ^a1 Cor. 1:17

^b[Matt. 28:18; Eph.

1:19–22] ^c[1 Pet.

5:4] ^dMatt. 17:1–5;

Luke 1:2

1:17 ^aPs. 2:7; Is. 42:1;

Matt. 17:5; Mark 9:7;

Luke 1:35; 9:35

1:18 ^aMatt. 17:1

1:19 ^a[John 1:4, 5, 9]

^bProv. 4:18 ^cRev.

2:28; 22:16 ^d[2 Cor.

4:5–7] ¹Or *We also*

have the more sure

prophetic word

1:20 ^a[Rom. 12:6]

¹Or *origin*

1:21 ^aJer. 23:26;

[2 Tim. 3:16]

^b2 Sam. 23:2; Luke

1:70; Acts 1:16; 3:18;

1 Pet. 1:11 ¹NU *men*

spoke from God

2:1 ^aMatt. 24:5, 24;

1 Tim. 4:1, 2

2:3 ¹M *will not*

2:4 ¹Lit. *Tartarus*

2:6 ^aGen. 19:1–26;

Jude 7

2:7 ^aGen. 19:16, 29

2:8 ^aPs. 119:139

2:9 ^aPs. 34:15–19;

1 Cor. 10:13; Rev. 3:10

2:10 ^aJude 4, 7, 8

^bEx. 22:28; Jude 8

¹glorious ones, lit. *glories*

18 And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on ^athe holy mountain.

Certainty of the Scriptures

19 ¹And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as ^alight that shines in a dark place, ^buntil ^cthe day dawns and the morning star rises in your ^dhearts;

20 knowing this first, that ^ano prophecy of Scripture is of any private ¹interpretation,

21 for ^aprophecy never came by the will of man, ^bbut ¹holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER 2

Danger of False Teachers

BUT there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be ^afalse teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, *and* bring on themselves swift destruction.

2 And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.

3 By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction ¹does not slumber.

Destruction of False Teachers

4 For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast *them* down to ¹hell and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment;

5 and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, *one of eight people*, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly;

6 and turning the cities of ^aSodom and ^aGomorrah into ashes, condemned *them* to destruction, making *them* an example to those who afterward would live ungodly;

7 and ^adelivered righteous Lot, *who was* oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked

8 (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, ^atormented *his* righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing *their* lawless deeds)—

9 *then* ^athe Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment,

Description of False Teachers

10 and especially ^athose who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. ^b*They are* presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of ¹dignitaries,