

# The Epistle of 2 Peter

## Authorship and Canonicity

Among all the Books of the New Testament, none has been more disputed as to canonicity and authorship than 2 Peter. Canonicity and authorship although not synonymous, are deeply interrelated because one of the main criteria for acceptance of a book as authoritative was its apostolic authorship or authorization. The canonicity of 2 Peter was questioned primarily because of doubts concerning its Petrine authorship.

There are eleven main arguments against Petrine authorship.

- 1) It lacks a long line of tradition.
- 2) Its style is different from that of 1 Peter, which was strongly accepted by the church as Petrine.
- 3) Peter's name was used in connection with some Gnostic literature.
- 4) Knowledge of 2 Peter was geographically limited.
- 5) Second Peter is too dependent on Jude.
- 6) The language is too Hellenistic for a Galilean fisherman.
- 7) The problem of the delay in the coming of Christ is a second-century one.
- 8) The collection of Pauline letters referred to in 2 Peter 3:15-16 was made in the second century.
- 9) Second Peter is not mentioned by Christian writers in the second century.
- 10) The letter sounds like early Catholicism rather than first generation Christianity.
- 11) If Peter wrote it, then why is there so much doubt about it and reluctance to accept it?

The vast majority of modern scholars do not even seek to disprove the authenticity of 2 Peter, they assume as a proven fact that Peter did not write this epistle.

While it is true that the external evidence for its authenticity is not as great as that for other New Testament books, the evidence is nevertheless ample.

Origen (c. 185-254) is the first known source to attribute the work to Peter. He said, "Peter has left one acknowledged epistle, and perhaps a second; for it is disputed." Second Peter is quoted by two apocryphal books dated in the second century - the *Gospel of Truth* and the *Apocryphon of John*. The Bodmer papyrus (P 72), which is dated to the third century, accepts 2 Peter as canonical. Irenaeus seems to have quoted from it and Eusebius admits that the majority of Christians accepted it while he himself refers to it only as a disputed book. Cyril of Jerusalem accepted it as canonical as did Jerome, Augustine and Athanasius. It is important to remember that while 2 Peter was one of several books questioned by some (antilegomena), it was *never rejected as spurious by any church*.

Moreover, the stated author of the epistle is the Apostle Peter (1:1). In the introduction he refers to himself as Simon Peter. Simon was his old name, reminiscent of his years as a Galilean fisherman; Peter (Cephas) was the name given to him by Jesus during their first personal encounter (John 1:40-42). The name, which means "rock" or "stone" was originally a descriptive title rather than a proper name, but it readily became a proper name for the apostle.

When 2 Peter was recognized and accepted as canonical by the church councils of the fourth century, this was done with their eyes open to the objections raised against it. We may conclude, therefore, that the evidence of authenticity was sufficient to overcome the doubts that had been expressed.

### **Date**

Reliable tradition asserts that Peter was martyred during the Neronian persecution; therefore, the date cannot be later than A.D. 68, the year of Nero's death. The epistle seems best placed as near to the end of Peter's life as feasible because Peter believed his own death was imminent (1:14-15). It seems that Peter probably died before Paul because he was no longer in Rome when Paul wrote 2 Timothy. Therefore, a date of 66-68 seems most likely.

### **Audience**

The only designation of the audience in this epistle is in 1:1: "to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours." However, 2 Peter was probably Peter's second letter to the same people he addressed in his first epistle (see, 1 Pet 1:1 and 2 Pet 3:1). The audience for both letters was in Asia Minor, the majority of whom had a Jewish background. It is clear that the letter was directed to an audience where the writings, leadership, and authority of Paul were taken for granted (3:15-16). While Peter no doubt had the recipients of his first letter in mind, the general designation in 2 Peter 1:1 may indicate a broader audience. Both letters were circulars.

### **Occasion**

The immediate occasion for this epistle was the information received concerning the outbreak and intrusion of false teaching among the churches addressed. Personal considerations probably also prompted Peter to write this second epistle. Advancing age and surging persecution made him conscious that his death was rapidly approaching (1:14-15). Inspired by the Holy Spirit, he used this occasion to share the deepest, abiding concerns of his heart.

### **Purpose**

The chief purpose of this epistle is to call Christians to spiritual growth so that they can combat false teaching as they look forward to the coming of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Kenneth O. Gangel, "2 Peter," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983), 862.

## Theme

The theme of this letter can be expressed in several different ways:

- faithful living in difficult times.
- the believer's conflict in the last days
- how to live when surrounded by the problems and perplexities of the end time.  
growth in grace today for gloom and glory tomorrow

“Second Peter breathes Christ and awaits His consummation.”

- E.G. Homrighausen

## Key Words

The key word in this epistle is “knowledge.” The words “know” and “knowledge” are used in various forms sixteen times. Clearly, our ability to grow in the Christian life (chapter 1), combat apostasy (chapter 2), and live in view of Christ's coming (chapter 3) are all dependent on our knowledge of God and His Word. Another key word is “remember” (1:12, 13; 3:1, 2). Peter's main ministry to these believers is to stir them up by reminding them of truths they already know.

## Outline

### **I. Introduction (1:1)**

### **II. Chapter 1 - The Call to Spiritual Growth**

Know Your Salvation!  
Be Growing

### **III. Chapter 2 - The Caution against Seducers**

Know Your Adversary  
BEWARE

### **IV. Chapter 3 - The Coming of the Savior**

Know Your Future!  
Be Ready

### **V. Conclusion (1:17-18)**

## Comparison of 2 Peter with 1 Peter

<u>1 Peter</u>	<u>2 Peter</u>
1. Faced potential persecution (opposition from outside)	1. Faced false teaching (opposition from inside)
2. Key: Hope	2. Key: True Knowledge
3. Dwells on life and death of Christ to comfort believers	3. Dwells on return of Christ to warn false teachers
4. Comfort for afflicted	4. Affliction for comfortable

### Exposition

#### I. The Call to Spiritual Growth (1:1-21) Know Your Salvation

##### A. The Basis of Spiritual Growth (1:1-4)

Peter opens by identifying himself (the author) and his audience. He describes himself as a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ. He describes the audience of the letter as those who have received a true, saving faith. This statement emphasizes that faith itself is God's gift. It is received.

In customary epistolary form the identification of the author and the addressees is followed by a brief greeting. This greeting contains the two common words grace and peace, but introduces the word "knowledge" that is a key word in this epistle, especially chapter one.

The rest of chapter one is really an elaboration of the things he wants them to know about their salvation and spiritual growth. Before talking about seducers (chapter 2) and the second coming (chapter 3), Peter wants to make sure they are grounded in the truth of their salvation and are growing spiritually. At the outset in vv. 3-4, Peter emphasizes the two main foundations for spiritual growth—God's **power** and **promises**.

##### B. The Process of Spiritual Growth (1:5-7)

In verses 5-7 the emphasis shifts to what the believer is to do in response to what God has done. The subject is spiritual growth. The believer is to diligently apply himself to add seven key virtues or qualities to the gift of faith that God gives: moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. These virtues have been referred to in various ways: The Fruit of the Tree of Faith, The Ladder of Virtue, The Melody of the Christian Life, The Scale of Christian Graces, and The Building Blocks of the Christian Life. This list of virtues carries forward in the discussion in 1:8-15. The phrase "these things" or "these qualities" is used five times and refers to these seven virtues (1:8, 9, 10, 12, 15). These seven virtues are to be built on faith (begin with faith and end with love).

### C. The Necessity of Spiritual Growth (1:8-11)

Having shown what God has done in salvation (Riches, 1:1-4), and what our response to this should be (Responsibility, 1:5-7), Peter now tells us why we should do it (Rewards, 1:8-11). VV. 8-11 focus on the rewards of salvation, or the incentives or motivation to the spiritual growth he has just described.

The 3 reasons we should be growing are that is *makes us useful* (8-9), *gives assurance* (10), and *brings future reward* (11)

V. 8 Obedience leads to knowledge

V. 9 Forgets that he is a new creation and lapses back into some of his former practices. Not that he forgets he is a Christian, but that he has been cleansed from these things.

V. 10 Verb “*make*” is middle voice. We do not make God sure of His calling and election, rather we make ourselves assured and confident.

V. 11 Speaks of rewards for the believer (NIV “receive a rich welcome”) This may look to the practice of welcoming an Olympic winner back to his hometown with a special entrance built to his honor in the town or the city wall.

### D. The Means of Spiritual Growth (1:12-21)

The key means or instrument of spiritual growth is God’s Word. In 12-18 the focus is on NT revelation, and in 19-21 it’s on OT revelation.

#### 1. NT Revelation (12-18)

In 1:12-15 the key word is “remind.” Peter says that his death is imminent, and he feels a sense of urgency to remind his readers of “these things” (the diligent pursuit of spiritual growth) as long as he is alive so that they will remember them even after he is gone.

VV. 16-18 look back to the Transfiguration (Matt 17:1-5; cf. Luke 9:31)

#### 2. OT Revelation (19-21)

V. 19 2 Views of the words “*more sure*”

View #1: Peter isn’t comparing one evidence against another, but is adding one on top of another. The transfiguration is a foreview of the fulfillment of the OT prophets. View #2: the words “*more sure*” mean that the prophetic witness is more sure than the transfiguration.

V. 19 What is “the morning star arising in your hearts?”

V. 20 Does this refer to interpretation or origination? 3 points favor the idea of origination: 1) the verb is *ginetai* (which means “came into being”), 2) v. 21 describes origination, and 3) the context is focused on the reliability of Scripture, not its interpretation.

Three key points about the revealed Word are stressed: its character (sure), its function (shining), and its origin (Spirit-given). Second Peter 1:21 is one of the great verses on revelation, verbal inspiration, and illumination of Scripture. The main point is that Christian salvation and its resulting spiritual growth rest on the solid bedrock of God’s revealed, inspired Word to man.

## II. The Caution against Seducers (2:1-22)                      Know Your Adversary

Having set forth the characteristics of salvation through Christ, Peter moves from the positive to the negative. He moves from *be growing* to *beware*. He warns the readers that false teachers are coming who deny the Master who bought them. Peter says that these false teachers will attract large crowds, bring reproach upon the truth, and exploit people for money.

V. 1 This supports the view of “unlimited atonement.”

In Peter the false teachers are future. In Jude they are already present. This means that Jude was written after 2 Peter.

Peter assures his readers that the actions of these false teachers will not go unpunished. Second Peter 2:3b-9 is one long “if-then clause.” In this section, he shows by three OT examples that God knows how to both rescue the righteous and punish the wicked in the day of judgment. The three OT illustrations are: the fallen angels in Genesis 6, Noah and the flood in Genesis 7-9, and Sodom and Gomorrah and Lot in Genesis 19. Notice they are in chronological order.

V. 9 Note: the unsaved are being punished now. This is also an argument against soul sleep.

Having given a summary portrait of false teachers (2:1-3a) and their destruction (2:3b-9) Peter moves to a full-blown, detailed description of false teachers (10-19). He focuses on four key areas.

1) Presumption (10b-13a). They are brazen, daring, and self-willed.

- 2) Practice (13b-14a). They live in luxury, extravagance, and sexual immorality.
- 3) Pursuit (14b-16). Very simply, their pursuit or motivation is money. They are modern Balaams. They are prophets for profit.
- 4) Preaching (17-19). Their message is all show and no substance. It is filled with ostentatious verbosity, arrogant words, and vanity that preys on the weakest, most vulnerable members of the flock.

VV. 20-22 Are they believers or unbelievers?

4 factors point to the view that they are unbelievers:

- 1) preceding context
- 2) compared to dogs and pigs, not sheep (Matt 7:1-6)
- 3) verb *ettonai* (from *ettao*, to be overcome) is present tense. This hardly describes a genuine Christian.
- 4) V. 20 does not say they were ever saved. It only affirms that they escaped defilement by the knowledge of correct doctrine. They then rejected the truth to return to their former manner of life.

The final point in this diatribe against false teachers is to expose the fearful destiny of false teachers (20-22). Peter describes their reformation and their return. They experience a reformation that falls short of true regeneration. Then they return to their former ways. Like a sick dog that dog that feels better for a while and a cleaned up pig that looks better, the false teachers never really change. They still have the same nature. Eventually, they return to the vomit and the mud. And ultimately they will face the judgment of God. The last state for them will be worse than the first both in this life and the next. In this life they are harder to reach with the truth (Matt 7:6) and the enemy gets a stronger hold in their life (Lk 11:24-28). And in the next life they will be refused entrance into the kingdom (Matt 7:15-23) and will receive severer punishment in hell (Lk 10:10-16; 12:42-48).

### III. The Coming of the Savior (3:1-18)

#### Know Your Future

The final section of this epistle deals with the coming of the Savior, primarily its certainty. Peter begins this section with a brief call for the readers to remember the teachings of the prophets and Christ. The reason for this reminder is scoffers or mockers will come in the last days (the time in between Christ's two advents) who will interpret the delay in Christ's coming as cancellation. Their main argument is based on the principle of uniformitarianism that basically rules out divine intervention in the universal order.

To combat this false notion Peter develops three key arguments.

1. The Historical Argument (3:5-6) – Uniformitarianism is not true because God made everything (Creation) and God destroyed everything with water (the Flood). God will someday destroy the present heaven and earth with fire (3:7)

2. The Biblical Argument (3:8) – This argument deals with God’s relationship to time. God does not view time the way man does, and we cannot force Him into our schedule.
3. The Theological Argument (3:9) – This argument deals with God’s use of time. God is patient. His delay is one of merciful patience for the lost.

V. 10 Evidently the Day of the Lord includes the end of the millennium. The Day of God is eternity. The Day of the Lord is the precursor to eternity.

V. 12 Can we hasten the coming of the end? How?

Having answered the objections of the scoffers, Peter moves to focus on the proper response to the coming of Christ, the destruction of the present heavens and earth, and the creation of a new heaven and new earth. The duty of believer’s in light of these truths is holy living and eager anticipation.

He rounds off this section with a reminder that God’s patience in the coming of Christ is for the purpose of salvation. Peter then reminds the readers that Paul has also written on this same subject. He says that Paul’s writings are often difficult to understand and importantly he equates Paul’s writings with Scripture.

The conclusion of the epistle brings together the three main threads of the letter. Peter gives a final warning against false teachers (3:17), an encouragement to grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus (3:18a), and a mention of the day of eternity (3:18b). This is a fitting summary of the purpose of this letter which is to call the believers to spiritual growth so they can combat false teaching as they await the coming of Christ.



**Recommended Books for 2 Peter**

Fruchtenbaum, Arnold G. *Hebrews-James-I & II Peter-Jude*. Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2005.

Gardner, Paul. *2 Peter and Jude*. Focus on the Bible. Ross-shire, Great Britain, 1998.

Hiebert, D. Edmond. *2 Peter and Jude*. Greenville, SC: Unusual Publications, 1989.

Lloyd-Jones, D. M. *Expository Sermons on 2 Peter*. Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1983.

MacArthur, John Jr. *2 Peter and Jude*. Chicago: Moody, 2005.

McQuaid, Elwood. *II Peter: Standing Fast in the Last Days*. Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel, 2001.

Phillips, John. *Exploring the Epistles of Peter*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005.

Swindoll, Charles R. *Insights on James, 1 & 2 Peter*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.