

Introduction to 2 Peter

English Standard Version Bible - *Study Bible*¹

Author and Title

Within 2 Peter itself there is strong evidence for authorship by the apostle Peter. In [1:1](#) the author claims to be “Simeon Peter... apostle of Jesus Christ.” Moreover, he claims to have been an eyewitness of the transfiguration ([1:16-18](#); cf. [Matt. 17:1-8](#)), an event where Peter is featured prominently in the Gospel accounts. If someone other than Peter wrote the letter under his name, as some scholars have claimed, it would be a case of deliberate deception, especially given the author’s claims to have witnessed the transfiguration. But there is no historical evidence in support of such a theory. Furthermore, writing in another person’s name was condemned among early Christians (cf. [2 Thess. 2:2](#); [3:17](#); see [Introduction to 1 Timothy: Author and Title](#)).

Some have suggested that the literary style of 2 Peter, which differs from that of 1 Peter, indicates an author other than Peter. But Peter may have used a secretary to help write this second letter, which would not affect the genuineness of his authorship if he ultimately approved what was written.

Scholars have also questioned Petrine authorship of 2 Peter because of the similarities between [chapter 2](#) of this letter and the book of Jude. But this is not a problem for apostolic authorship, since Peter may have included in his letter elements from Jude that he thought would be helpful for his readers. It also could have worked the other way, with Jude using Peter’s letter as *his* source. The parallels are close but almost never exact, so it is difficult to sort out the relationship between 2 Peter and Jude with any degree of certainty.

It is reasonable in light of all the evidence, and clearly supported by the claims of the letter itself, to conclude that the apostle Peter wrote 2 Peter.

Date

Peter probably wrote this letter from Rome not too long before his martyrdom, sometime during A.D. 64-67. Elements within the letter lead many scholars to conclude that Peter wrote during a time of persecution by Rome (perhaps during the persecution by Nero, who died in A.D. 68), while Peter himself was in a Roman prison awaiting imminent execution (cf. [1:12-15](#)). The dating of the letter, then, depends largely on the dating of Peter’s death.

Theme

Second Peter teaches that the grace of God in Christ truly transforms and empowers Christians to live righteously, even in the face of opposition. This grace, introduced in [1:2-4](#), serves as the foundation for the remainder of the exhortations. The indwelling Holy Spirit (cf. [1:4](#), which characterizes Christians as “partakers of the divine nature”) produces virtuous “qualities” in followers of Christ ([1:8-12](#)), which in turn results in fruitful lives.

1. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "2 Peter".

Purpose, Occasion, and Background

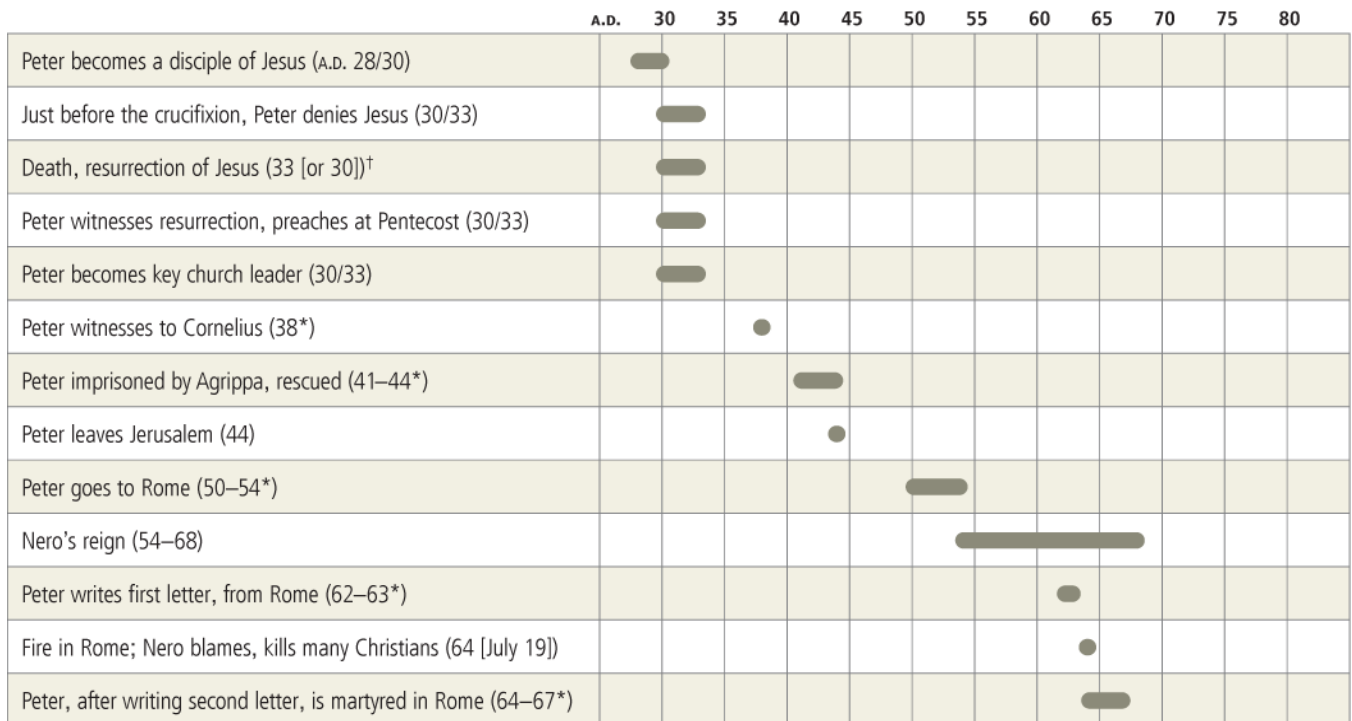
Peter writes this brief, final reminder to the churches so that his readers will by God’s grace live a life that is pleasing to God. In doing so, Peter must also combat the false teachers who were apparently exerting pressure on the churches to depart from the true knowledge of Christ (see esp. [ch. 2](#)). The false teaching is not only a theological challenge but also a moral one, holding forth some form of sexual permissiveness as a legitimate Christian lifestyle. While the false teaching can be described based on what Peter writes, it is historically impossible to identify who the false teachers were. For example, there is no clear historical evidence that these teachers were Gnostic or proto-Gnostic.

It is also impossible to identify with certainty the churches Peter is addressing. The leading historical candidates are the churches of Asia Minor, for Peter wrote his first letter to these churches ([1 Pet. 1:1-2](#)), and in this letter Peter mentions that this is his second letter to these same people ([2 Pet. 3:1](#)).

Key Themes

1. God, through his grace in Jesus Christ, has granted to Christians the privilege of partaking of the divine nature.	1:2-4
2. God’s grace results in godliness.	1:5-15
3. The revelation of truth in Christ (and in Scripture, 1:19) is sure because it is from God and not from man-made myths.	1:16-21
4. False teachers are bound over for destruction at the hand of God.	2:1-10
5. False teachers are ethically bankrupt.	2:11-22
6. Believers must endure in the face of opposition, knowing that they live in the last days.	3:1-13
7. The Lord is patient with his creation, but will surely return in judgment like a thief in the night.	3:8-10
8. God rescues the righteous.	2:7-9 ; 3:13-18

Timeline



* denotes approximate date; / signifies either/or; † see *The Date of Jesus’ Crucifixion*, pp. 1809–1810

Literary Features

The primary form is the epistle, with its usual elements. Partly on the basis of [1:13-14](#), where Peter asserts that he will soon depart this life, it is customary to view 2 Peter as adhering to some of the conventions of the farewell discourse. Motifs that belong to that genre include the author's (a) announcing that he is near the end of his earthly life, (b) reminding his followers of what he has taught them, (c) commanding his followers how to live, and (d) predicting what will happen in the future. In a farewell discourse, a leader has his last chance to influence his followers in the right direction for the sake of the movement in which he has been a guiding light. Second Peter is also filled with famous proverbs and aphoristic statements, vivid poetry and imagery, and an eschatological (end-time) discourse ([ch. 3](#)).

Much of the letter falls into place if one grasps that Peter's horror at false teaching (see esp. [ch. 2](#)) is set over against the reliability of God's prophetic word ([1:19-21](#); [3:1-2](#)). These two motifs converge in the vision of the last chapter, where biblical prophecy about the return of Christ is aggressively offered as a rebuttal of scoffers (false teachers) who denigrate biblical prophecy. In 2 Peter, true and false teaching engage in a combat of huge proportions.

Outline

1. **Initial Greeting ([1:1-2](#))**
2. **God's Grace in Christ Is the Source of Godly Living ([1:3-11](#))**
 1. God's power exercised on our behalf ([1:3-4](#))
 2. Making every effort to live a godly life ([1:5-7](#))
 3. Living an effective life for Christ ([1:8-11](#))
3. **Peter's Reminder to the Churches ([1:12-21](#))**
 1. Stirring up Christians to holiness ([1:12-15](#))
 2. Peter's preaching results from his own eyewitness experience ([1:16-18](#))
 3. Truth about Jesus Christ anchored in the prophetic word of Scripture ([1:19-21](#))
4. **Evaluation of False Teachers ([2:1-22](#))**
 1. Influence of false teachers ([2:1-3](#))
 2. Judgment of false teachers ([2:4-10a](#))
 3. Character of false teachers ([2:10b-16](#))
 4. Influence of false teachers revisited ([2:17-22](#))
5. **The Day of the Lord Will Surely Come ([3:1-13](#))**
 1. Scoffers challenge the truth of Scripture concerning the coming of the Lord ([3:1-7](#))
 2. The Lord's patience determines the timing of his return ([3:8-10](#))
 3. Living effectively in view of the Lord's return ([3:11-13](#))
6. **Concluding Exhortations ([3:14-18](#))**
 1. Concerning diligence ([3:14](#))
 2. Concerning the distortion of Paul's teaching ([3:15-16](#))
 3. Concerning the proper response to Paul's teaching ([3:17-18](#))

Holman Christian Standard Bible - *Study Bible*²

Introduction

Second Peter, one of the General Epistles, emphasizes practical Christian living. To this end, Peter wrote to warn against false teachers and the negative influence they can have on moral living. The letter emphasizes true knowledge of God while facing false teaching and encourages readers to maintain Christian virtue in the midst of the world's vice.



First century A.D. ruins outside the synagogue (fourth century A.D.) at Capernaum with Peter's memorial in the background. The memorial is built on what may have been Peter's house.

Author: The author of 2 Peter plainly identified himself as the apostle Peter ([1:1](#)). He called himself "Simeon Peter" ([1:1](#)), a name not generally used of the apostle (elsewhere only in [Ac 15:14](#)). The spelling is Semitic and lends a sense of authenticity to Peter's letter. Moreover, it was natural for Peter, as a Semite, to use the original form of his name. Peter designated himself as "a slave and an apostle of Jesus Christ." He viewed himself as a servant submitted to Christ's lordship and as a divinely ordained, directly commissioned, authoritative representative of the Lord Jesus Himself.

The letter contains several personal allusions to Peter's life. He mentioned that his death was close ([1:14](#)), described himself as an eyewitness of the transfiguration of Jesus ([1:16-18](#)), quoted the words of the voice from heaven at this event ([1:17](#)), indicated that he had previously written to the letter's

2. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Jonah".

recipients (whom he called "dear friends" in [3:1](#)), and also called Paul "our dear brother" ([3:15](#)). This suggests that the author was close to Paul. Such references point to Peter as the author.

Many contemporary scholars, however, reject Peter as the author of this letter. They argue, for example, that (1) the personal references to Peter's life are a literary device used by someone who wrote under the apostle's name in order to create the appearance of authenticity; (2) the style of Greek in 2 Peter is different from that of 1 Peter; (3) the reference to Paul's letters as a collection ([3:15-16](#)) points to a date later than Peter's lifetime; and (4) 2 Peter was dependent upon Jude. If this is true, Peter's authorship is problematic.

In response to these objections, one should consider that (1) the early church soundly rejected the practice of writing under an apostolic pseudonym, regarding it as outright forgery; (2) Peter may have had help in writing 1 Peter ([1Pe 5:12](#)) and not in writing 2 Peter, which would lead to different styles in his Greek; (3) rather than the whole collection, Peter may have referred only to those Pauline letters that were known at the time of writing; and (4) Peter may have borrowed some from Jude, or both may have used a common source. All of these evidences suggest that 2 Peter should be accepted as authentic.

Background: Unlike 1 Peter, 2 Peter does not mention specific recipients or refer to an exact destination. The apostle referred to his epistle as the "second letter" he had written to his readers ([3:1](#)). If the letter written prior to 2 Peter is 1 Peter, then he wrote to the same recipients ("the temporary residents dispersed in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia"; [1Pe 1:1](#)). But if the previous letter is a reference to some other epistle that is now unknown, we cannot determine with certainty to whom or to where 2 Peter was written.

Peter likely wrote 2 Peter from Rome, where church tradition placed the apostle in his latter days. Because he mentioned that his death was near ([1:14](#)), it seems the letter was written just before his death. Tradition places the date of Peter's martyrdom at about A.D. 67 during Nero's reign (ruled A.D. 54-68).

Second Peter's literary relationship with Jude is debated. What one decides about this issue inevitably affects the authorship and date of each letter. Both epistles are strikingly similar in content. Thus, if 2 Peter borrowed from Jude and the latter book was written somewhere between A.D. 65 and 80, the apostle Peter could not have been the author of 2 Peter. The use of 2 Peter by Jude, however, poses no problem for authorship or dating. Jude may have borrowed from 2 Peter, or both authors may have used a common source.

Peter wrote this letter shortly before he died ([1:14](#)) and though not mentioned, possibly while in prison. He wrote to Christian friends confronted with the threat of false teachers who were denying Christ's saving work and second coming. As an eyewitness of Jesus' life ([1:16-18](#)), Peter sought to affirm for his readers the reality of Christ's return and to remind them of truths they might otherwise forget ([3:1](#)).

Message and Purpose

Peter cautioned believers to beware of false teachers with their bogus doctrines and licentious lifestyles. The temptation to a sinful lifestyle so concerned Peter that shortly after his first letter, he followed up with this one. Peter also warned against denials of Christ's return with its accompanying judgment. He urged his readers to make every effort to grow in the knowledge and practice of the Christian faith.

Contribution to the Bible

Peter made strong connections with the OT and challenged his audience to live authentic Christian lives. Peter had been with Jesus when Jesus first spoke of His return ([Mt 24-25](#)), and he gave emphasis to the surety of the second coming.

It is the word of God that holds the forefront of this short letter. Peter does this in chapter 1 by emphasizing knowledge ([vv. 3,5,6,8,12,20-21](#)) and its divine origin; in chapter 2 by showing its historicity ([vv. 4-8](#)); and in chapter 3 by indicating Paul's letters are equal with "the rest of the Scriptures" ([vv. 15-16](#)). Peter insisted on the importance of Scripture for guiding and preserving our faith.

Structure

Second Peter is a general letter with the typical features of a salutation, main body, and farewell. What is missing is an expression of thanksgiving. Its style is that of a pastoral letter, driven by the needs of the recipients, rather than some type of formal treatise.

Outline

- I. Greeting ([1:1-2](#))
- II. Building on Faith with Godly Qualities ([1:3-11](#))
- III. The Apostle Peter's Testimony ([1:12-21](#))
- IV. Warning Against False Teachers ([2:1-22](#))
- V. Certainty of Christ's Return ([3:1-10](#))

Prehistory-A.D. 29

Noah, his family, and the animal kingdom are spared in the great flood.

God rescues Lot from the complete destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. [2085 B.C.?](#)

Israel killed every male, including Balaam, in their war against Midian. [1407 B.C.](#)

Jesus calls Simon Peter "the Rock." A.D. [29](#)

Jesus calls Peter to be one of His 12 disciples. A.D. [29](#)

A.D. 30-33

Jesus heals Simon Peter's mother-in-law. [30](#)

Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi that Jesus is the Messiah [32](#)

Peter, James, and John witness Jesus' transfiguration. [32](#)

Peter vows to die with Jesus. [33](#)

Peter denies Jesus in the courtyard of Annas. [33](#)

A.D. 33-40

Following His resurrection, Jesus appears to Peter and recommissions him. [33](#)

3,000 persons respond to Peter's sermon at the feast of Pentecost. [33](#)

Saul's conversion on the Damascus Road [October 34](#)

Paul meets with Peter and James on his first visit to Jerusalem following his conversion. [37?](#)

Peter bears witness to and baptizes Cornelius and his family at Caesarea Maritima. [40](#)

A.D. 50-Second Century

Peter, James, John, Paul, Barnabas, and Titus meet in Jerusalem to deal with the question of whether Gentiles had to be circumcised to become Christians. [49](#)

At Antioch, Paul confronts Peter's refusal to share meals with Gentile believers. [49](#)

Peter's martyrdom in Rome during Nero's persecution of Christians [66](#)

Destruction of Jerusalem [70](#)

Allusions to 2 Peter may exist in a number of second-century documents, including *1, 2 Clement*, *Barnabas*, *Shepherd of Hermas*, the letters of Ignatius of Antioch, and the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*.



WARNINGS have many forms: lights, signs, sights, sounds, smells, feelings, and written words. With varied focus, their purpose is the same—to advise alertness and give notice of imminent danger. Responses to these warnings will also vary—from disregard and neglect to evasive or corrective action. How a person reacts to a warning is usually determined by the situation and the source. One reacts differently to an impending storm than to an onrushing automobile, and the counsel of a trusted friend is heeded more than advice from a stranger or the fearful imaginings of a child.

Second Peter is a letter of warning—from an authority none other than the courageous, experienced, and faithful apostle. And it is the last communication from this great warrior of Christ. Soon thereafter he would die, martyred for his faith.

Previously Peter had written to comfort and encourage believers in the midst of suffering and persecution—an external onslaught. But three years later, in this letter containing his last words, he wrote to warn them of an internal attack—complacency and heresy. He spoke of holding fast to the nonnegotiable facts of the faith, of growing and maturing in the faith, and of rejecting all who would distort the truth. To follow this advice would ensure Christ-honoring individuals and Christ-centered churches.

After a brief greeting ([1:1](#)), Peter gives the antidote for stagnancy and shortsightedness in the Christian life ([1:2-11](#)). Then he explains that his days are numbered ([1:12-15](#)) and that the believers should listen to his messages and the words of Scripture ([1:16-21](#)).

3. , *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 2137-2138.

Next, Peter gives a blunt warning about false teachers ([2:1-22](#)). They will become prevalent in the last days ([2:1, 2](#)); they will do or say anything for money ([2:3](#)); they will despise the things of God ([2:2, 10, 11](#)); they will do whatever they feel like doing ([2:12-17](#)); they will be proud and boastful ([2:18, 19](#)); they will be judged and punished by God ([2:3-10, 20-22](#)).

Peter concludes his brief letter by explaining why he has written it ([3:1-18](#)): to remind them of the words of the prophets and apostles that predicted the coming of false teachers, to give the reasons for the delay in Christ's return ([3:1-13](#)), and to encourage them to beware of heresies and to grow in the faith ([3:14-18](#)).

Addressed to those who "share the same precious faith," 2 Peter could have been written to us. Our world is filled with false prophets and teachers, who claim to have the truth and who clamor for attention and allegiance. Listen carefully to Peter's message and heed his warning. Determine to grow in your knowledge of Christ and to reject all those who preach anything inconsistent with God's Word.

Vital Statistics

Purpose:

To warn Christians about false teachers and to exhort them to grow in their faith in and knowledge of Christ

Author:

Peter

Original Audience:

The church at large

Date Written:

Approximately A.D. 67, three years after 1 Peter was written, possibly from Rome

Setting:

Peter knew that his time on earth was limited ([1:13, 14](#)), so he wrote about what was on his heart, warning believers of what would happen when he was gone—especially about the presence of false teachers. He reminded his readers of the unchanging truth of the gospel.

Key Verse:

"By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence" ([1:3](#)).

Key People:

Peter, Paul

Special Features:

The date and destination are uncertain, and the authorship has been disputed. Because of this, 2 Peter was the last book admitted to the canon of the New Testament Scripture. Also, there are similarities between 2 Peter and Jude.

The Blueprint

1. Guidance for growing Christians ([1:1-21](#))
2. Danger to growing Christians ([2:1-22](#))
3. Hope for growing Christians ([3:1-18](#))

While Peter wrote his first letter to teach about handling persecution (trials from without), he wrote this letter to teach about handling heresy (trials from within). False teachers are often subtly deceitful. Believers today must still be vigilant against falling into false doctrine, heresy, and cult activity. This letter gives us clues to help detect false teaching.

MEGATHEMES		
THEME	EXPLANATION	IMPORTANCE
<i>Diligence</i>	If our faith is real, it will be evident in our godly behavior. If people are diligent in Christian growth, they won't backslide or be deceived by false teachers.	Growth is essential. It begins with faith and culminates in love for others. To keep growing we need to know God, keep on following him, and remember what he taught us. We must remain diligent in faithful obedience and Christian growth.
<i>False Teachers</i>	Peter warns the church to beware of false teachers. These teachers were proud of their position, promoted sexual sin, and advised against keeping the Ten Commandments. Peter countered them by pointing to the Spirit-inspired Scriptures as our authority.	Christians need discernment to be able to resist false teachers. God can rescue us from their lies if we stay true to his Word, the Bible, and reject those who distort the truth.
<i>Christ's Return</i>	One day Christ will create a new heaven and earth, where we will live forever. As Christians, our hope is in this promise. But with Christ's return comes his judgment on all who refuse to believe.	The cure for complacency, lawlessness, and heresy is found in the confident assurance that Christ will return. God is still giving unbelievers time to repent. To be ready, Christians must keep on trusting and resist the pressure to give up waiting for Christ's return.