

GOD'S AMAZING BOOK

THROUGH THE BIBLE, BOOK BY BOOK

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KNOWING AND GUARDING THE TRUTH A Quick Look at the General Epistle of 2 Peter ¹

Peter is quick to remind us that the believer can and will conquer through conflict. Times may be harsh and corruption rampant, but those whose faith rests in the Lord will not only survive, they will be victorious. – Charles Swindoll

*The best defense is a strong offense. Peter illustrated that axiom by calling his readers to a life of maturity as the best safeguard against the inroads of apostasy.
– Robert Gromacki*

2 Peter is a sobering reminder that the Christian faith always seems merely one generation from extinction! Knowing and guarding the truth are as important as seeking to live it. – Irving Jensen

Fast Facts on 2 Peter

Written by? Peter

Written to whom? Christians who were scattered, persecuted, and maligned.

Written when? A.D. 65-66

Written why? To warn against false teaching, doctrinal error, and moral compromise as we live in the last days.

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, 2 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.²

2 Peter is a “farewell speech” sent as a letter urging Christian growth and perseverance in light of some false teachers who both deny the second coming of Christ and live boldly in sin. [Gordon Fee]

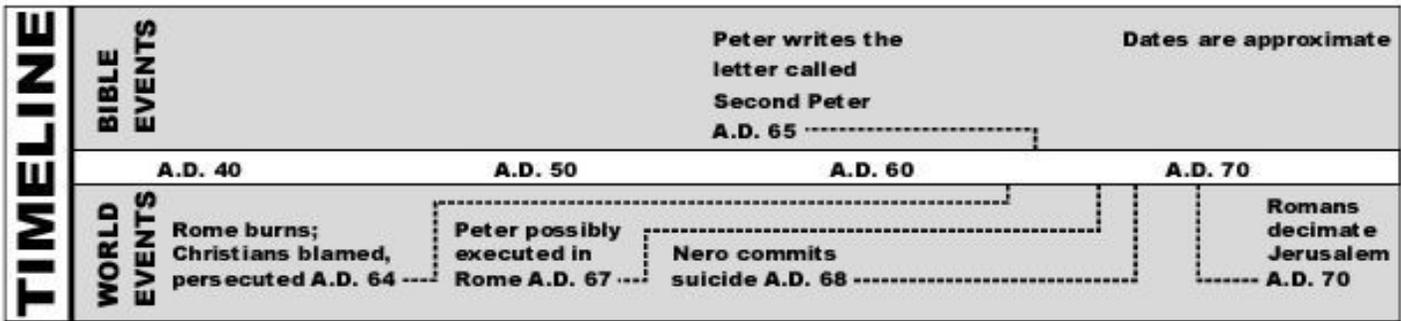
THINGS TO REMEMBER ABOUT 2 PETER³

1. The authorship and canonicity of 2 Peter combined have been challenged and attacked perhaps more than any other New Testament book.
2. Only 2 Peter and Jude contain New Testament references to the fall of angels (see 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6).
3. **2 Peter contains one of the two main statements on the inspiration of Scripture (2 Peter 1:20-21).**
4. 2 Peter is the only New Testament book that describes how the heavens and earth will pass away (3:10-13).
5. **Peter is the only New Testament writer to refer to the inspired writings of another New Testament writer, Paul (3:15-16).**
6. There are similarities and parallels between 2 Peter and Jude, and Jude probably borrowed from Peter’s writing.
7. After the first verse, Peter always uses the title of “Lord” in every reference to Jesus.
8. In 2 Peter, one entire chapter out of three is devoted to the subject of false teachers (ch. 2).
9. **In this second epistle, Peter makes reference to his experience on the Mount of Transfiguration (1:16b-18).**

¹ Some material comes from Daniel Akin’s handout for a local church on “2 Peter” www.danielakin.com

² *Nelson’s Complete Book of Bible Maps & Charts* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996).

³ Jeff Lasseigne, *Highway 66* (Santa Ana, CA: Calvary Chapel Publishing, 2004)



LIFE LESSONS FROM 2 PETER⁴

1. You are commanded to grow in your knowledge of God.
2. Your growth combats spiritual laziness and deception by the enemy.
3. Do not fail to heed the warnings of Scripture.
4. Each day that the Lord delays His return is to be a day devoted to holy living and diligent service.
5. Put more stock in the Word of God than in any other “experience” (visions, dreams, voices, etc.)

PETER – The Apostle with the Foot-Shaped Mouth

Strengths and accomplishments:

- Became the recognized leader among Jesus' disciples -- one of the inner group of three
- Was the first great voice of the gospel during and after Pentecost
- Probably knew Mark and gave him information for the Gospel of Mark

Weaknesses and mistakes:

- Often spoke without thinking; was brash and impulsive
- During Jesus' trial, denied three times that he even knew Jesus
- Later found it hard to treat Gentile Christians as equals

Lessons from his life:

- Enthusiasm has to be backed up by faith and understanding, or it fails
- God's faithfulness can compensate for our greatest unfaithfulness
- It is better to be a follower who fails than one who fails to follow

Dr. Alexander Whyte summarizes Peter’s personality most succinctly: “No disciple speaks so often and so much as Peter. Our Lord speaks oftener to Peter than to any other of His disciples: sometimes in praise, sometimes in blame. No disciple is so pointedly reproved by our Lord as Peter, and no disciple ever ventures to reprove his Master but Peter. No other disciple ever so boldly confessed and outspokenly acknowledged and encouraged our Lord as Peter repeatedly did, and no one ever intruded, and interfered, and tempted Him as repeatedly as Peter did. Peter’s Master spoke words of approval, and praise, and even blessing to Peter the like of which he never spoke to any other man. And at the same time, and almost in the same breath, He said harder things to Peter than He ever said to any other of His twelve disciples, unless it was to Judas.”

Contrasts before and after Pentecost:

Matthew 26:58, 69–74	Once coward, now courageous
John 18:10	Once impulsive, now humble
Matthew 16:21, 22	Once ignorant, now enlightened
John 21:21, 22	Once deeply inquisitive, now submissive
Matthew 26:33, 34	Once boastful of self, now boastful of Christ
Matthew 14:28–31	Once timid and afraid, now fearless

History tells us that before Peter was crucified, he had to watch the crucifixion of his own wife. It is said that as he watched her being led to her death, Peter called to his wife by name and said, “Remember the Lord”! When it was his turn, he pleaded to be crucified upside down because he wasn’t worthy to die as his Lord had died. And so he was nailed to a cross head-downward. (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, 3:1, 30)

⁴ Jim George, *The Bare Bones Bible Handbook*

I. Author – Simon Peter is the stated author of this letter (1:1). This affirmation is supported by the text of the epistle by the following evidence: (1) the use of the first person pronoun in the context of Jesus' prediction of his death (cf. 1:14), (2) the claim to be an eyewitness of the transfiguration of Jesus (cf. 1:16-18), (3) the acknowledgement to the readers that this is his second epistle (3:1), (4) his references to Paul as "our beloved brother" (3:15), and (5) his honest admission that in Paul's letters are "some things hard to understand" (3:16). External evidence for the authenticity of 2 Peter also exists, though it must be admitted, it is not as strong as it is for the first epistle. 1 Clement (c. A.D. 95) and the Didache (c. A.D. 100) may allude to it. In the late second and early third centuries, support for its canonicity (inclusion in Holy Scripture) grows, though some doubted its genuineness. Eusebius (A.D. 265-340) classified the book as *antilegomena* or disputed (other N.T. books disputed but eventually recognized as divinely inspired include Hebrews, James, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation). By the end of the fourth century, the epistle was generally accepted by the vast majority of the Christian world. Modern critical scholars have attacked this book more than any other in the New Testament as to its authenticity. Many have judged it as pseudepigraphic (meaning a "false writing"), i.e., a forgery, and date it well after the time of Peter's death (c. A.D. 67-68). Some would even date it in the second century. Most skeptical scholars do not wish to remove the book from its authoritative place in Holy Scriptures (though some do), but they argue that the style and vocabulary of 2 Peter is so different from that of 1 Peter that it rules out a common author. Some believe the differences to be so significant that if the two letters had been anonymous, no one would have ever thought to attribute them to a common authorship.

How should we respond to these issues? There is indeed a difference in style. However, the real difference is between the Petrine epistles and the rest of the New Testament. The fact is no other book is as much like 1 Peter as 2 Peter (with the exception of Jude). The differences that do exist may be explained by a change in subject matter, by time and circumstances of writing, and especially by the part played by an amanuensis (secretary). In 1 Pet. 5:12, Peter suggests the strong possibility that Silvanus (Silas) served as the amanuensis for this epistle. 2 Peter has no such reference. Perhaps some differences in style and vocabulary can be attributed to the service of Silvanus as an amanuensis for the writing of 1 Peter, whereas Peter himself (or some other secretary) is responsible for the actual and direct penning of 2 Peter. When a careful study and a balanced investigation is made, there is no compelling reason for rejecting 2 Peter as genuine. The letter should be viewed as authentic. It comes from the apostle whose name it carries.

II. Date - The second epistle appears to have been written shortly after the first and from the same location, probably from Rome (cf. 1 Pet. 5:13 and the cryptic use of "Babylon" for Rome). Proper assignment then is c. A.D. 65-66, during the latter part of the reign of the infamous Roman emperor Nero (A.D. 54-68), and toward the end of Peter's life (cf. 1:12-15).

III. Place of Writing - Peter wrote that he was in "Babylon" when he penned the letter (5:13). Three locations have been suggested for this "Babylon." First, a Roman outpost in northern Egypt was named Babylon; but that place was too obscure, and there are no reasons to think that Peter was ever there. Second, ancient Babylon in Mesopotamia is a possibility; but it would be quite unlikely that Peter, Mark, and Silvanus were all at this rather small, distant place at the same time. Third, "Babylon" is an alias for Rome; perhaps even a code word for Rome. In times of persecution, writers exercised unusual care not to endanger Christians by identifying them. Peter, according to some traditions, followed James and Paul and died as a martyr near Rome about two years after he wrote this letter, thus he had written this epistle near the end of his life, probably while staying in the imperial city. He did not want the letter to be found and the church to be persecuted, so he may have hidden its location under the code word, "Babylon," which aptly fit because of the city's idolatry (cf. Rev. 17, 18).⁵

IV. Theme - A variety of subjects is discussed in 2 Peter, but all reaffirm the truthfulness of the apostolic witness and the need to be forewarned of the imminent danger of the testimony by false teachers. The book concludes with an eschatological note designed to encourage and fortify the faith of believers. 2 Peter is a short letter of just 61

⁵ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 481.

verses and three chapters. Its message, however, is concise and clear: beware of false teachers, theological error and moral corruption as we live in the last days before Jesus comes again.

- V. Purposes -**
- 1) To encourage spiritual growth (chapter 1)**
 - 2) To counter false teaching (chapter 2)**
 - 3) To foster watchfulness in light of our Lord's certain return (chapter 3)**

Key Doctrines in 2 Peter⁶

False teachers—their teachings deny Christ and twist the Scriptures (chapt. 2; Deut. 13:1–18; 18:20; Jer. 23; Ezek. 13; Matt. 7:15; 23:1–36; 24:4, 5; Rom. 16:17; 2 Cor. 11:13, 14; Gal. 3:1, 2; 2 Tim. 4:3, 4)

Scripture—the Holy Spirit, as divine author and originator of all Scripture, worked through humans to convey the Word of God (1:20, 21; Jer. 1:4; 3:2; John 10:34, 35; 17:17; Rom. 3:2; 1 Cor. 2:10; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16; Titus 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:10, 11)

Christian character—God gives all believers the power to grow in faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love (1:5–11; Ps. 4:3; Prov. 28:1; 1 Cor. 9:27; Gal. 5:23; Col. 1:4; 1 Thess. 4:9; 1 Pet. 4:8; 1 John 4:20; Rev. 17:14)

Christ's second coming—God has continual patience to allow people to repent before Christ returns (3:1–13; Dan. 7:13; Matt. 24:30; 25:31; John 14:3; 1 Thess. 4:16; 2Thess. 1:10; 1 Tim. 6:14; Heb. 9:28; Jude 14; Rev. 1:7)

The Relation of 2 Peter and Jude: There is a close relationship between 2 Peter and Jude. The resemblances are largely between 2 Pet. 2:1-18; 3:1-3 and Jude 4-13, 16-18. There are four possible explanations for this close resemblance. (1) Jude is dependent on 2 Peter; (2) 2 Peter is dependent on Jude; (3) Both letters were dependent on a common source; or (4) Common authorship. **The majority view is that 2 Peter is dependent on Jude.** Since Jude is shorter, there seems to be no reason to suppose that it would have been published after 2 Peter if all the common points had been covered. Some also argue that Jude is more harsh, and that 2 Peter softens the tone. Jude makes use of apocryphal material, and Peter allegedly corrects this in his letter. However, it is certainly conceivable that Jude may have used 2 Peter to meet his particular situation. Just because it is shorter does not mean that Jude could not have used the pertinent parts and adapted them to suit his own purpose. It is also possible that Jude saw the need to adopt a stronger approach as the threat of false teaching was growing stronger. It is quite probable that Jude makes a reference to 2 Peter. This is seen most clearly in Jude 17, which exhorts the readers to remember the apostles' predictions and the words cited occur almost verbatim in 2 Pet. 3:3. Further, **it seems that Jude is experiencing what Peter prophesied. Peter said false prophets were coming and Jude says that false prophets are here.** This could also help to explain the harsher tone of Jude. Another reason to hold to Petrine priority is that it is more difficult to conceive of Peter (a well-known apostle) making use of a lesser known non-apostle, than it is to conceive of Jude referring to Peter.

A Suggested Outline of 2 PETER	
I. Cultivation of Christian Character	1:1–21
A. <i>Salutation</i>	1:1, 2
B. <i>Growth in Christ</i>	1:3–14
C. <i>Grounds of Belief</i>	1:15–21
II. Condemnation of False Teachers	2:1–22
A. <i>Danger of False Teachers</i>	2:1–3
B. <i>Destruction of False Teachers</i>	2:4–9
C. <i>Description of False Teachers</i>	2:10–22
III. Confidence of Christ's Return	3:1–18
A. <i>Mockery in the Last Days</i>	3:1–7
B. <i>Manifestation of the Day of the Lord</i>	3:8–10
C. <i>Maturity in View of the Day of the Lord</i>	3:11–18
[NELSON'S COMPLETE BOOK OF BIBLE MAPS & CHARTS]	

⁶ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 490.

What does Peter mean by the counsel to “make your call and election sure” (1:10)?

This phrase hits the theological bull’s-eye Peter was aiming at in 1:5–9. Though God is “sure” who His elect are and has given them an eternally secure salvation (Rom. 8:31–39; 1 Pet. 1:1–5), the Christian might not always have inward assurance of salvation. Security is the fact revealed by the Holy Spirit that salvation is forever. Assurance is one’s confidence that he or she possesses that eternal salvation. In other words, the believers who pursue the spiritual qualities mentioned in the context of this phrase will guarantee to themselves by spiritual fruit that they were called (Rom. 8:30; 1 Pet. 2:21) and chosen (1 Pet. 1:2) by God to salvation.

How does Peter explain the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture (1:19–21)?

This particular section of 2 Peter provides crucial insights regarding the nature and authenticity of Scripture. Even the apostle expected his readers to provide a reasonable defense for their confidence in the Scriptures. He realized that false teachers would attempt to discredit his letter as well as his past ministry, so he countered their arguments. He knew they would accuse him of concocting fables and myths as a way to manipulate his audience. (This charge by the false teachers actually revealed their own approach and purpose.) So, Peter gave evidence in this passage to prove that he wrote the truth of God as a genuinely inspired writer.

Peter details the process of inspiration. Scripture, claims Peter, is not of human origin. Neither is Scripture the result of human will (1:21). The emphasis in this phrase is that no part of Scripture was produced solely because men wanted it so. The Bible is not the product of sheer human effort. The prophets, in fact, often wrote what they could not understand (1 Pet. 1:10–11), but they were nevertheless faithful to write what God revealed to them. Instead of relying on their own purposes, men were “moved by the Holy Spirit” (1:21) to write. Grammatically, this means that they were continually carried or borne along by the Spirit of God (Luke 1:70; Acts 27:15, 17). The Holy Spirit thus is the divine author and originator, the producer of the Scriptures. In the OT alone, the human writers refer to their writings as the words of God over 3,800 times (Jer. 1:4; 3:2; Rom. 3:2). Though the human writers were active rather than passive in the process of writing Scripture, God the Holy Spirit superintended them so that, using their own individual personalities, thought processes, and vocabulary, they composed and recorded without error the exact words God wanted written. The original documents of Scripture are therefore inspired (God-breathed, 2 Tim. 3:16), and inerrant (without error, John 10:34, 35; 17:17; Titus 1:2). Peter here has described the process of inspiration that created an inerrant original text (Prov. 30:5; 1 Cor. 14:36; 1 Thess. 2:13).

What do Peter’s comments about Paul’s writings mean (2 Pet. 3:15, 16)?

In the final thoughts of his letter, Peter turns for biblical support to the writings of Paul. Since Paul had (by the time Peter wrote) written all his letters and died, the readers of 2 Peter would have already received letters about future events from Paul. Some of Paul’s explanations were difficult (but not impossible) to interpret. Nevertheless, Peter does not hesitate to use Paul as a support for his own teaching.

Peter then goes on to add a word of caution in pointing out that there were those willing to “twist” (3:16) and pervert the apostle’s teaching about the future. The fact that distorting Paul’s writings can lead to eternal damnation proves that God inspired Paul’s writings. Peter’s further addition of the phrase, “the rest of the Scriptures” (3:16), offers one of the most clear-cut statements in the Bible to affirm that the writings of Paul are Scripture. Peter’s testimony is that Paul wrote Scripture, but the false teachers distorted it. The NT apostles were aware that they spoke and wrote the Word of God (1 Thess. 2:13) as surely as did the OT prophets. Peter affirmed that the NT writers compiled the divine truth that completed the Bible (1 Pet. 1:10–12).

⁷ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 492.