

Promised Land Ministries
L.O.S.T. - Teaching Ministry
(Love, Obedience, Surrender, Transformed)

The Book of 2nd Peter

The Big Idea

In his first letter Peter feeds Christ's sheep by instructing them how to deal with persecution from outside the church (see 1 Pe 4:12); in this second letter he teaches them how to deal with false teachers and evildoers who have come into the church (see 2:1; 3:3-4). While the particular situations naturally call for variations in content and emphasis, in both letters Peter as a pastor ("shepherd") of Christ's sheep (John 21:15-17) seeks to commend to his readers a wholesome combination of Christian faith and practice. More specifically, his purpose is threefold: (1) to stimulate Christian growth (ch. 1), (2) to combat false teaching (ch. 2) and (3) to encourage watchfulness in view of the Lord's certain return (ch. 3).

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Author

The author identifies himself as Simon Peter (1:1). He uses the first person singular pronoun in a highly personal passage (1:12–15) and claims to be an eyewitness of the transfiguration (1:16–18 [see note on 1:16]; cf. Mt 17:1–5). He asserts that this is his second letter to the readers (3:1) and refers to Paul as “our dear brother” (3:15; see note there). In short, the letter claims to be Peter’s, and its character is compatible with that claim.

Although 2 Peter was not as widely known and recognized in the early church as 1 Peter, some may have used and accepted it as authoritative as early as the second century and perhaps even in the latter part of the first century (1 Clement [a.d. 95] may allude to it). It was not ascribed to Peter until Origen’s time (185–253), and he seems to reflect some doubt concerning it. Eusebius (265–340) placed it among the questioned books, though he admits that most accept it as from Peter. After Eusebius’s time, it seems to have been quite generally accepted as canonical.

In recent centuries, however, its genuineness has been challenged by a considerable number of interpreters. One of the objections that has been raised is the difference in style from that of 1 Peter. But the difference is not absolute; there are noteworthy similarities in vocabulary and in other matters. In fact, no other known writing is as much like 1 Peter as 2 Peter. The differences that do exist may be accounted for by variations in subject matter, in the form and purpose of the letters, in the time and circumstances of writing, in sources used or models followed, and in scribes who may have been employed. Perhaps most significant is the statement in 1Pe 5:12 that Silas assisted in the writing of 1 Peter. No such statement is made concerning 2 Peter, which may explain its noticeable difference in style (see Introduction to 1 Peter: Author and Date).

Other objections arise from a secular reconstruction of early Christian history or misunderstandings or misconstructions of the available data. For example, some argue that the reference to Paul’s letters in 3:15–16 indicates an advanced date for this book—beyond Peter’s lifetime. But it is quite possible that Paul’s letters were gathered at an early date, since some of them had been in existence and perhaps in circulation for more than ten years (Thessalonians by as much as 15 years) prior to Peter’s death. Besides, what Peter says may only indicate that he was acquainted with some of Paul’s letters (communication in the Roman world and in the early church was good), not that there was a formal, ecclesiastical collection of them.

Date

2 Peter was written toward the end of Peter’s life (cf. 1:12–15), after he had written a prior letter (3:1) to the same readers (probably 1 Peter). Since Peter was martyred during the reign of Nero, his death must have occurred prior to a.d. 68; so it is very likely that he wrote 2 Peter between 65 and 68.

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Some have argued that this date is too early for the writing of 2 Peter, but nothing in the book requires a later date. The error combated is comparable to the kind of heresy present in the first century. To insist that the second chapter was directed against second-century Gnosticism is to assume more than the contents of the chapter warrant. While the heretics referred to in 2 Peter may well have been among the forerunners of second-century Gnostics, nothing is said of them that would not fit into the later years of Peter's life.

Some have suggested a later date because they interpret the reference to the fathers in 3:4 to mean an earlier Christian generation. However, the word is most naturally interpreted as the OT patriarchs (cf. Jn 6:31, "forefathers"; Ac 3:13; Heb 1:1). Similarly, reference to Paul and his letters (3:15-16; see Author) does not require a date beyond Peter's lifetime.

2 Peter and Jude

There are conspicuous similarities between 2 Peter and Jude (compare 2Pe 2 with Jude 4-18), but there are also significant differences. It has been suggested that one borrowed from the other or that they both drew on a common source. If there is borrowing, it is not a slavish borrowing but one that adapts to suit the writer's purpose. While many have insisted that Jude used Peter, it is more reasonable to assume that the longer letter (Peter) incorporated much of the shorter (Jude). Such borrowing is fairly common in ancient writings. For example, many believe that Paul used parts of early hymns in Ph 2:6-11 and 1Ti 3:16.

Purpose

In his first letter Peter feeds Christ's sheep by instructing them how to deal with persecution from outside the church (see 1Pe 4:12); in this second letter he teaches them how to deal with false teachers and evildoers who have come into the church (see 2:1; 3:3-4 and notes). While the particular situations naturally call for variations in content and emphasis, in both letters Peter as a pastor ("shepherd") of Christ's sheep (Jn 21:15-17) seeks to commend to his readers a wholesome combination of Christian faith and practice. More specifically, his purpose is threefold: (1) to stimulate Christian growth (ch. 1), (2) to combat false teaching (ch. 2) and (3) to encourage watchfulness in view of the Lord's certain return (ch. 3).

Bible Course Outline

- I. Greetings (1:1-2)
- II. Exhortation to Growth in Christian Virtues (1:3-11)
 - A. The Divine Enablement (1:3-4)
 - B. The Call for Growth (1:5-7)
 - C. The Value of Such Growth (1:8-11)
- III. The Purpose and Authentication of Peter's Message (1:12-21)
 - . His Aim in Writing (1:12-15)
 - A. The Basis of His Authority (1:16-21)
- IV. Warning against False Teachers (ch. 2)

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- . Their Coming Predicted (2:1-3a)
- A. Their Judgment Assured (2:3b-9)
- B. Their Characteristics Set Forth (2:10-22)
- V. The Fact of Christ's Return (3:1-16)
 - . Peter's Purpose in Writing Restated (3:1-2)
 - A. The Coming of Scoffers (3:3-7)
 - B. The Certainty of Christ's Return (3:8-10)
 - C. Exhortations Based on the Fact of Christ's Return (3:11-16)
- VI. Conclusion and Doxology (3:17-18)