

# 2 Peter

Dr. Michael J. Frazier

## INTRODUCTION

The letter known as Second Peter is often overlooked by Christians today. The reason for this is the letter's brevity and contemporary concerns over authorship. In fact, no other letter in the New Testament is more scrutinized than Peter's second letter. However, the letter is vitally important for us today. Peter wrote this short letter to combat heresy confronting church. The key to understanding the destructive doctrine is found in the word *know*. The word is found 16 times in 61 verses. Considering the brevity of the letter, the large number of occurrences is stunning. Although the word has variance within the epistle, ἐπίγνωσις (knowledge) carries the idea of something that may be fully known in relationship to God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Some scholars believe that this reference to "knowledge" points to gnostic teaching in the letter. However, the gnostic presupposition is hard to prove from the internal matters found in the epistle. What is easier to prove is that the heresy was destructive to the believers' faith.

Therefore, Peter urgently wrote the letter to warn churches against falling prey to these heretical teachings and to strengthen their faith in Christ. Peter's letter has relevance for the contemporary church. We face a culture which is becoming more anti-Christian and is seeking to infiltrate the church with all kinds of issues concerning morality, sexuality and other forms of spirituality not found in the Bible. The church is under fire from within and from without. Many Christians in the contemporary church simply do not *know* how to withstand the onslaught of contemporary attacks. The reason is that many believers are not grounded in the faith and are susceptible to a wide range of false reasoning and ideologies of our culture. If we are going to change the world with the life changing message of the gospel, we are going to have to continue to grow "in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18).

### I. AUTHORSHIP OF THE EPISTLE

#### A. Objections to Petrine authorship

1. The designation of "Simon Peter" (2 Pet. 1:1) is different from "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:1). Those who point to this do so by stating that the writer is over-eager to establish apostolic authority.
2. Stylistic objections. Those who argue against Petrine authorship base their conclusion on the differences in language between 1 and 2 Peter. Albert Barnett notes, "Differences in style form 1 Peter create insuperable difficulties for the

view that the two epistles have a common author.”<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, Edmond Hiebert notes, “It is generally accepted that there is a definite literary relation between the Epistle of Jude and 2 Peter, especially chapter 2. It is commonly assumed today that 2 Peter drew from Jude.”<sup>2</sup>

3. Doctrinal matters. There are a variety of doctrinal matters which cause some scholars to question the authorship of Peter. For example, the Holy Spirit is prominent throughout 1 Peter but is mentioned only once in 2 Peter. Scholars point out that this would be uncharacteristic of Peter.
4. 2 Peter 3:2 and 3:4. The author writes, “your apostles” (3:2) and “ever since your fathers fell asleep” (3:4) points to a later period. Those who hold this view believe 2 Peter was written sometime in the second-century well after the death of the founding fathers.
5. 2 Peter 3:15-16. “Our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you” (3:15) and “as he does in all his letters.” Those who use these verses for a later date argue this “implies that a collection of books has already been made and that they are already regarded as Scripture on a level with the Old Testament, presupposes a state of affairs which certainly did not obtain in Peter’s lifetime or for a number of years after his death.”<sup>3</sup>
6. Response to the critics.
  - a. First, the double designation of “Simon Peter” is hardly a strong argument against Petrine authorship. “Simon” was his old name before coming to Christ. “Peter” was his new name given to him by Christ (Matt. 16:18). Therefore, Hiebert correctly notes, “the double name probably has a testamentary import, bearing witness to the crucial change that Jesus wrought in his own life.”<sup>4</sup> Since the epistle confronts opponents to the gospel, it is clear Peter wanted to point out the difference between those who were saved and those of the opposition.
  - b. Second, as to the stylistic difference between 1 and 2 Peter, most scholars brush this argument aside. Schreiner rightly notes, “Some differences between the two letters may be observed, and yet we must be cautious about drawing definite conclusions when our database is so limited.”<sup>5</sup> Although

---

<sup>1</sup> Albert E. Barnett. *The Second Epistle of Peter*, in *The Interpreter’s Bible* (1957). Pg. 156

<sup>2</sup> Edmond Hiebert. *Second Peter and Jude*. (Greenville, SC. 1989). Pg. 14

<sup>3</sup> C.E.B. Cranfield. *I and II Peter and Jude* (TBC, 1960). Pg. 148

<sup>4</sup> Hiebert, pg. 30.

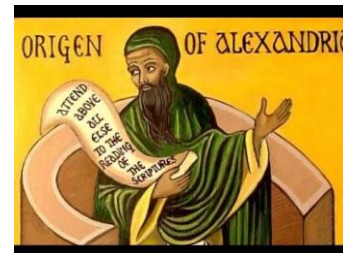
<sup>5</sup> Thomas Schreiner. *The New American Commentary*. (Broadman & Holman. 2003). Pg. 265

there are differences in the style of writing between 1 and 2 Peter, I would note that the situation was different and the subject matter was different.

- c. Third, the absence of the Holy Spirit's presence in 2 Peter reveals nothing about authorship. Peter is dealing with destructive teaching in his letter. There are numerous letters in the New Testament which give weightier matters on some doctrinal issues and less on others. Therefore, to dismiss Petrine authorship on this issue is absurd.
- d. 2 Peter 3:2 and 3:4. The phrase "your apostles" probably refers to specific apostles who evangelized and taught the church receiving this letter. Furthermore, the phrase "ever since your fathers fell asleep" can be easily explained. The word "fathers" never refers to a first generation but is commonly understood as a reference to the Old Testament patriarchs (cf. Matt. 23:30,32; Luke 1:55,72; Jn. 4:20; 6:31,49,58; Acts 3:13,25; 5:30, etc.) Therefore, to suggest that this refers to a later date is not in accordance with the theological understanding of the word.
- e. 2 Peter 3:15-16. The phrase "Our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you" doesn't suggest that the letters were already canonized. The letters were still in circulation and were passed from one church to another. Therefore, to suggest that this phrase identifies the writings with a later date is also ridiculous. The author is simply stating that the audience is aware of the apostle's letters because they had read them. I would argue that the inclusion of the Apostle Paul in 2 Peter reveals that the letter was written in a contemporary setting. Furthermore, the phrase "as he does in all his letters" suggest that these letters are in the present time. Again, there is nothing in the text which supports the idea for a later date based on these objections.

## B. External Evidence for Petrine authorship

1. Origen (185 – c. 254) credits Peter as the author of both epistles. Origen notes that some theologians in the early church disputed and questioned the authorship of Peter. However, since he doesn't mention these scholars name, it is generally understood that he didn't take these objections seriously.
2. In A.D. 256, Firmilian, Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, acknowledges that Peter had confronted heretics in his second epistle.



3. Methodius, Bishop of Olympus in Lycia, in his writings on "*The Resurrection*" quotes 2 Peter 3:8 and attributes the letter to Peter.
  4. In 324 A.D., Eusebius (c. 265 – c. 339) refers to Peter as the author of the letter in his work *Ecclesiastical History*. Furthermore, he acknowledges that most theologians accepted Peter as the author of the epistle.
  5. Jerome (c. 345 – c. 419) places 2 Peter in the canon in his Vulgate (Latin Bible) version. However, he notes that there were questions concerning stylistic differences between the first and second letters. Jerome argues that stylistic differences were the result of a second amanuenses.
  6. Second-century works, *The Gospel of Truth* and *The Apocryphon of John*, recently discovered in Egypt, both include reference quotes from 2 Peter. The writer attributes Peter as the author of the epistle.
- C. Internal Evidence: Simple argument for Petrine authorship
1. The author of the epistle calls himself, "Simon Peter" (1 Pet. 1:1).
  2. The author recalls the Lord's prediction to him concerning his death (1 Pet. 1:14).
  3. The author claims to be a witness to the transfiguration of Christ (1 Pet. 1:16-18).
  4. The author mentions a previous letter he wrote (1 Pet. 3:1).
  5. The author puts himself on the same level as the Apostle Paul (1 Pet. 3:15).

## II. THE AUDIENCE AND OPPONENTS

- A. The Audience: Gentile & Jewish Communities
1. The author identifies the audience in 1 Peter 1:1, "To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours."

2. Most scholars argue that the phrase “equal standing with ours” means that Peter is speaking to a Gentile audience. The word “ours” seems to suggest that the writer is of different descent than the readers of the letter.

3. However, Theodor Zahn argues that these believers were Jewish Christians living in Palestine and Syria, who were led to Christ by Peter and some of the other apostles.<sup>6</sup>

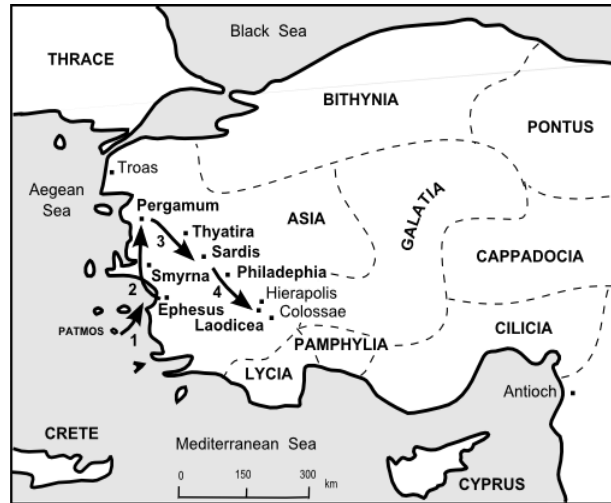
4. The key: If the second letter connects to the first letter, then the origination would be Asia

Minor. We find confirmation of this in 2 Peter 3:1, “This is now the second letter that I am writing to you.” Although a small number of theologians would disagree, the majority identify the designation of the letter to be to Gentile churches of Asia Minor. Schreiner affirms by writing, “If one understands the first letter to refer to 1 Peter, then the letter was sent to churches in Asia Minor, churches that were mainly Gentile.”<sup>7</sup>

5. However, these churches were a mixture of Jewish and Gentile Christians. Edmond Hiebert notes that the churches were “probably mixed communities, many whom had a Gentile background.”<sup>8</sup>

#### B. The Opponents: Libertarian lifestyle

1. Apparently, these adversaries of the gospel were within the church (2:1-3). They were claiming to be Christian but were not living accordingly.
2. They denied the future coming of Christ (1:16-8; 3:4-7). Their obstinate objection to the return of Christ is found in their questioning, “Where is the promise of his coming?” (3:4).
3. Furthermore, the false believers denied the future judgement of mankind (2:3-10). Peter’s lengthy dialog in this section reveals the heart of their rejection, “especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise



<sup>6</sup> Theodor Zahn. Introduction to the New Testament (1909). Pg. 207

<sup>7</sup> Schreiner. Pg. 276-277

<sup>8</sup> Hiebert, Pg. 21

authority” (2:10). Generally, the contents of a letter expose the source of the problem. In this case, the false teachers rejected God’s authority to judge the world. This charge sounds like our world today – If God is a good God, how can he judge the world?

4. The rejection of judgement led to a libertine lifestyle. Schreiner is correct in observing, “They probably used Paul’s writings in defense of their licentiousness, perhaps arguing that God’s grace released believers from ethical obligation.”<sup>9</sup> Moreover, this “freedom to sin life-style” is found in Peter’s rebuke, “They promise freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption” (2 Pet. 2:19). Bauckham rightly notes, “The opponents’ eschatological skepticism was advanced not simply in the interest of intellectual honesty, but in the interest of moral freedom.”<sup>10</sup> Live as you please because there is no coming judgment.
5. Furthermore, they insinuated that the apostles invented the Second Coming. Peter writes, “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:16).
6. Finally, and most harmful is the fact that they denied the prophetic Scriptures. 2 Peter 1:20-21 says, “Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”
7. So, Peter paints a clear picture of these false brethren: freedom to sin without a sense of retribution or judgment from God. The Holy Scripture is un-inspired and therefore is an invention of man. Unfortunately, this sounds like many “so called” Christian and denominations today. The grace of God is transformed into the disgrace of sinful and immoral lifestyle.

### III. DATE & PLACE OF WRITING

#### A. Date of writing: A.D. 65 or 66

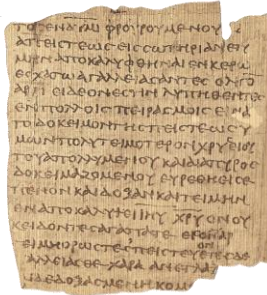
1. Recent controversy has arisen as to the date of the epistle. Scholars who argue for a second century time frame do so based on 2 Peter 3:16. They believe Paul’s letters were organized by this time and thus Peter could not have been the author of the letter. They place the date of writing around A.D. 150.

---

<sup>9</sup> Schreiner, 277

<sup>10</sup> Bauckham, 155.

2. In rebuttal to this claim, F.H. Chase writes, “It is impossible to suppose that a collection of St. Paul’s epistles had been made and that they were treated as Scripture during the lifetime of St. Peter.”<sup>11</sup>



2 Peter Manuscript

3. Most scholars believe the letter is written by Peter and place the date of writing around 65-68 A.D. Tradition is that Peter was martyred during the reign of Emperor Nero. Since Nero died in 68 A.D., scholars assert that Peter’s second letter must have been written prior to his death.

4. Edmond Hiebert notes, “The actual year of his martyrdom is uncertain, some placing his death shortly after the outbreak of the persecution but others making it as late as A.D. 67 or even 68.”<sup>12</sup>

5. Finally, given that Peter probably died before Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy, it is possible that Peter met his demise during the first wave of Nero’s campaign against Christians. If this scenario is correct, then I would place the date of writing around A.D. 65 or 66.



Emperor Nero

**B. Place of writing: Rome**

1. There is very little discussion among scholars as to the place of writing. The reason for this is because of internal lack of information.

2. However, many scholars believe that Peter was executed in Rome. Robert Gromacki writes, “There is no indication where Peter was at the time of writing. Since tradition placed his martyrdom in Rome, he may have been in the city at that time.”<sup>13</sup>



Traditional site of Peter’s imprisonment

<sup>11</sup> F.H. Chase. A Dictionary of the Bible, ed. James Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1902). Pg. 810.

<sup>12</sup> Hiebert, pg. 22

<sup>13</sup> Robert G. Gromacki. New Testament Survey (Baker Book House. Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1974). Pg. 361.

3. Therefore, it seems logical to follow the traditional view that the letter was written from Rome.

#### IV. OCCASION & PURPOSE

##### A. Occasion of writing

1. The apostle Peter is advancing in years when he hears troubling reports about the church in Asia Minor. Also, he probably knew that his time was short in this life.
2. The churches were experiencing an onslaught of false teaching. Scholars acknowledge that these false teachers had infiltrated the church. So, the pressure to adhere was coming from within.
3. These heretics scorn authority, mock the truth of judgment, deny the physical return of Christ and promote a godless lifestyle.
4. Therefore, Peter urgently writes to combat the antinomian (without spiritual law) teaching and to encourage the church to denounce these false teachers.

##### B. Purpose for writing

1. Peter is aware of the danger confronting church. So, he writes to encourage the church to continue to follow the teachings of Christ.
2. Peter writes on various topics which reveal the challenges confronting the church:
  - a. Spiritual life – God has given every spiritual thing to the Christian to live a life of godliness (1:3).
  - b. Spiritual growth – The Christian is not to remain stagnant in their walk with God, but are to continue growing (1:5-8).
  - c. Scriptural foundation – The Christian is to hold fast to the teachings of the Scripture (1:16-21). Since the Bible has its origin in God and not from man; it can be trusted and must be obeyed.
  - d. Standing firm on the truth – The church is to hold its ground against false teaching (2:1-3).



- e. Judgment is coming – Peter mentions three examples from the Old Testament of God’s judgment: the angels who sinned (2:4), the Noahic flood destroying mankind (2:5) and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.
- f. Heresy identified – Peter uses Old Testament poetry to outline the destructive nature of the false teachers (2:10-22).
- g. Warns of the coming return of Christ (3:1-13). He challenges believers to remain steadfast knowing that the Lord will return and not to believe those who question.

### OUTLINE OF 2 PETER

- I. The Opening Greeting (1:1-2)
  - A. The Writer (1a)
    - 1. His name
    - 2. His heart
    - 3. His position
  - B. The Readers (1b)
    - 1. Their faith
    - 2. Their righteousness
    - 3. Their God and Savior
  - C. The Greeting (2)
    - 1. Grace
    - 2. Peace
    - 3. Knowledge
- II. The Nature of the Christian Life (1:3-21)
  - A. The Divine Bestowal of Spiritual Life (1:3-4)
    - 1. The nature of the bestowal (3a)
    - 2. The means of the bestowal (3b-4a)
    - 3. The result of the bestowal (4b)
  - B. The Necessary Growth in the Christian Life (1:5-11)
    - 1. The qualities involved in spiritual growth (5-7)
    - 2. The incentives to spiritual growth (8-9)
    - 3. The exhortation to spiritual growth (10a)
    - 4. The results of spiritual growth (10b-11)
  - C. The Authoritative Ground for the Christian Life (1:12-21)
    - 1. The personal concern of the apostle (12-15)

- 2. The objective certainty of Christian truth (16-21)
- III. The Warning Against False Teachers (2:1-22)
- A. The Summary Portrayal of the False Teachers (2:1-3)
    - 1. The characterization of the false teachers (1)
    - 2. The success of the false teachers (2)
    - 3. The motives of the false teachers (3a)
    - 4. The doom of the false teachers (3b)
  - B. The Judicial Actions of God Against Evil (2:4-10a)
    - 1. The examples of God's past judgments (4-8)
    - 2. The conclusion concerning divine justice (9-10a)
  - C. The Denunciation of the False Teachers (2:10b-22)
    - 1. The graphic picture of the false teachers (10b-16)
    - 2. The seductive influence of the false teachers (17-19)
    - 3. The tragic status of the false teachers (20-22)
- IV. The Certainty of Christ's Return (3:1-18a)
- A. The Heretical Denial of Christ's Return (3:1-7)
    - 1. The purpose of the apostle in writing (1-2)
    - 2. The denial of Christ's return by the mockers (3-4)
    - 3. The fallacy in the claim of the mockers (5-7)
  - B. The Correct View Concerning Christ's Return (3:8-13)
    - 1. The explanation concerning the apparent delay (8-9)
    - 2. The portrayal of the Day of the Lord (10)
    - 3. The duty of holy living in view of that day (11-12)
    - 4. The expectation of believers concerning the future (13)
  - C. The Concluding Exhortations in View of the Future (3:14-18a)
    - 1. The exhortations in view of the Christian hope (14-16)
    - 2. The exhortations concerning their spiritual maturity (17-18a)
- V. The Concluding Doxology (3:18b)