

CHAPTER 4

2 PETER

Introduction to 2 Peter

Author of 2 Peter

2 Peter is the most disputed book of the entire NT. The evidence for it from the early church is not as strong as that for the other books. This is in spite of 1:1, “Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ,” and of 3:1, “Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you.”

There are some phrases in the early fathers which are similar to phrases in 2 Peter, but no quotation as such attributing it to the apostle until Origen, who said, “And Peter . . . has left one acknowledged epistle; perhaps also a second, but this is doubtful” (quoted by Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6:25:8 [NPNF/2, 1:273]).

Likewise Eusebius himself questioned the genuineness of the epistle: “One epistle of Peter, that called the first, is acknowledged as genuine. . . . But we have learned that his extant second epistle does not belong to the canon; yet, as it has appeared profitable to many, it has been used with the other Scriptures. The so-called Acts of Peter, however, and the Gospel which bears his name, and the Preaching and the Apocalypse, as they are called, we know have not been universally accepted” (*Hist. eccl.* 3:3:1-3 [NPNF/2, 1:133-34]). Note that Eusebius, while not certain of 2 Peter’s classification, does not include it in the list of definitely pseudepigraphal works attributed to Peter.

Three major positions have developed.

(1) 2 Peter genuine, written by Peter

B. B. Warfield, “The Canonicity of Second Peter,” *Southern Presbyterian Review*, vol. 33 (Jan. 1882), pp. 45-47; reprinted in *Shorter Works* 2, ch. 4

Warfield, “Dr. Edwin A. Abbot on the Genuineness of Second Peter,” *Southern Presbyterian Review*, vol. 34 (1883), pp. 390-445

Charles Bigg, *ICC commentary on Peter and Jude* (1902), pp. 199-247

Michael Green, *TNTC on 2 Peter and Jude* (rev. ed. 1987), pp. 13-39 (a good discussion)

NT introductions: Zahn; Guthrie; Harrison (somewhat); Carson, Moo, and Morris

(2) 2 Peter pseudepigraphal, written in 2nd century A.D.

J. B. Mayor, commentary on 2 Peter and Jude (1907), pp. xvii-cxxxiv

W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the NT* (1973)

Cf. F. F. Bruce, *NT History*, which does not include Jude or 2 Peter among the writings of the first century, or even discuss those books; cf. his *Tradition: Old and New*, pp. 146-48

(3) 2 Peter not written by Peter, but by one of his circle, later in the 1st century, ca. A.D. 80-90

A “compromise” position

Understands 2 Peter to be a “testament,” or “dying words,” rather than an ordinary letter

Harrison’s introduction seems to like it (rev. ed., 1971), pp. 425-28

Richard J. Bauckham, commentary on Jude & 2 Peter (*WBC*, 1983), pp. 131-71

(Good questions against the “compromise” view in rev. ed. of Green, pp. 34-39)

Main arguments (some used in favor, some against Petrine authorship):

The main arguments used against Petrine authorship:

- Church fathers
- Style different from 1 Peter
- Relation to Jude
- Fathers had died (2 Pet 3:4, They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.”)

Discussion of arguments, pro and con:

1) Statement of text, 1:1 (also 3:1)

2) Testimony of early church

Divided, much uncertainty until near end of fourth century; no denial except in Syrian region; more positive evaluation by Warfield, "Canonicity"

3) Circumstances of the author

Fit with Peter (see Harrison, pp. 423-24)

4) Similarities to Jude

2 Peter genuine: may favor Jude quoting 2 Peter (but not necessarily)

2 Peter not genuine: favors 2 Peter quoting Jude

Another possibility: a common source (not favored by many, but Green likes it, pp. 58-64)

Note on three possibilities of relation of Jude to 2 Peter:

a) Jude quotes Peter

- Peter the main apostle
- Appropriate for Jude to quote him
- Some think it would be unseemly for Peter to quote Jude

b) Peter quotes Jude

- Nearly entire book of Jude is quoted
- No reason to write Jude if 2 Peter already written
- Jude more detailed, easy for Peter to simplify

c) Common source

- Much memory use in NT times (cf. Synoptic Gospels)

5) Relation to 1 Peter

Some similarities in thought and style, but noticeable differences

Possibility of a different amanuensis (cf. 1 Pet 5:12)

6) Reference to Paul and his epistles (3:15-16)

2 Pet 3:15-16, Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

Has a bearing on both authorship and date

In spite of differences (Gal 2:11-14), Paul and Peter had basic agreement (Gal 2:15-21), and Paul appreciated Peter (1 Cor 9:5).

7) Reference to the death of the fathers

Some take 2 Pet 3:4 to teach that the first generation of Christians had died, thus placing the book after the death of Peter (e.g., Bauckham, pp. 290-93).

2 Pet 3:4, They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."

General usage of "the fathers" would fit better with OT patriarchs

Date of 2 Peter

If Peter is the author, then the date of composition would be shortly before his death in Rome (2 Pet 1:13-15). This would place the epistle sometime between A.D. 64 and 68. Since Paul does not refer to Peter in 2 Timothy, it seems probable that Peter's death was either somewhat earlier, ca. A.D. 65-66, or somewhat later, ca. A.D. 67.

Those who hold to the book being the product of someone in his circle of acquaintances would date it ca. A.D. 80-90. And those who believe it is completely pseudepigraphal date it ca. A.D. 125-150.

Audience and purpose

Audience

Had already received a letter (2 Pet 3:1)

Probably include the same as addressed in 1 Peter

Northern and western Asia Minor

Jewish and Gentile Christians (2 Pet 1:1)

Purpose

To remind them of important truths before Peter's death

2 Pet 1:12-15; 3:1, 8 (see points of outline below)

Summary outline

- 1) Greeting, 1:1-2
- 2) The Christian's foundation, 1:3-21
 - a) The foundation of godliness, 1:3-11
 - b) The foundation of Scripture, 1:12-21
- 3) False teachers, ch. 2 (similar to Jude)
- 4) The day of the Lord, 3:1-16
 - a) The time of the Lord's coming, 3:1-9
 - b) The results of the Lord's coming, 3:10-13
 - c) Our waiting for the Lord's coming, 3:14-16
- 5) Concluding exhortation, 3:17-18

Commentaries

Charles Bigg (*ICC*, 1-2 Peter and Jude; 2nd ed, 1902)

Joseph B. Mayor (Jude and 2 Peter, 1907; repr. Baker, 1965)

Michael Green (*TNTC*, 2 Peter and Jude, 1968; rev. ed. 1987)

J. N. D. Kelly (Thornapple Com., 1-2 Peter and Jude, 1969)

Richard J. Bauckham (*WBC*, Jude and 2 Peter, 1983)

Simon J. Kistemaker (*NTC, 1-2 Peter and Jude*, 1987)

Outline of 2 Peter

1. *Greeting, 1:1-2*

1:1, Author Simon Peter (double name; just Peter in 1 Peter)

Servant and apostle (1 Peter has just apostle)

Righteousness of God, his faithfulness to his promises

“God” is same person as “Jesus Christ” (Granville Sharp rule)

1:2, Knowledge of God

Knowledge, a key concept in 2 Peter

γινώσκω *ginosko*, “to know,” in 1:20; 3:3

γνώσις *gnosis*, “knowledge,” in 1:5, 6; 3:18

ἐπιγινώσκω *epiginosko*, “to know (well),” in 2:21 (twice)

ἐπίγνωσις *epignosis*, “thorough knowledge,” in 1:2, 3, 8; 2:20

2. *The Christian's foundation, 1:3-21*

Peter is concerned that the Christians stand firm and be loyal to Christ after he is gone. They need to be aware not only of the outward persecution that the church will need to endure, but also of the attacks of Satan within. They must fight against evil tendencies in their own hearts by active sanctification (vv. 3-11). And they must be able to resist false teachers, and those who will seek to deprive them of their hope (ch. 2-3); their strong defense is the Word of God (vv. 12-21).

a. *The foundation of godliness, 1:3-11*

vv. 3-4, God's power and promises, the basis of godliness

Called us “by his own glory and virtue” (UBS {B}), ἰδίᾳ *idia*, “by his own,” instead of διὰ *dia*, “through, by”; definitely not “to glory and virtue” (as in KJV)

God’s power and promises:

Give us all we need for godliness

Enable us to escape worldly desires and corruption

vv. 5-9, Cultivation of godly qualities

vv. 5-7, The chain of qualities:

πίστις <i>pistis</i>	faith
ἀρετή <i>arete</i>	goodness, moral excellence
γνώσις <i>gnosis</i>	knowledge
ἐγκράτεια <i>egkrateia</i>	self-control
ὑπομονή <i>hypomone</i>	patient endurance, perseverance
εὐσέβεια <i>eusebeia</i>	godliness (v. 3)
φιλαδελφία <i>philadelphia</i>	brotherly kindness, affection
ἀγάπη <i>agape</i>	love

v. 8, Result of these qualities: makes knowledge productive

v. 9, Result of not having these qualities: blindness

vv. 10-11, Encouragements to cultivation of godliness

Assurance of faith

Actual perseverance

Welcomed “richly” in the coming kingdom of God

b. The foundation of Scripture, 1:12-21

The only sure foundation for faith and practice is the Scripture. Peter emphasizes that godliness must be based on the truth. His own eyewitness testimony confirms the truth of the Christian faith. But especially the teachings of the Bible, which are more certain than even his own eyewitness testimony, will lead them to full Christian maturity.

vv. 12-15, Reason for Peter's reminding the Christians

vv. 12-13, The truth needs to be repeated even to those who know

“Tent” of his body; cf. Paul in 2 Cor 5:1

v. 14, Peter's coming death

Reference to words of Jesus in John 21:18-19

v. 15, The truth to remain after Peter's death

“departure,” ἔξοδος *exodos*, Luke 9:31

Also used by Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3:1:1, “Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church. After their departure [*exodos*], Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter.” (*ANF* 1:414)

His determination to make every effort, could refer to work on gospel of Mark

vv. 16-18, Peter's witness to the transfiguration

v. 16, Cleverly invented stories

μῦθοι *muthoi*, “myths”; many take the transfiguration itself to be a myth, developed perhaps from some simple event in Jesus' life. For example, see Jerome Murphy O'Connor, O.P., “What Really Happened at the Transfiguration?” *Bible Review* 3:3 (fall, 1987) 8-21; O'Connor believes that Luke's account is closest to the “original” (p. 16), then he says, “Mark turned a dry factual story into a narrative whose power is felt to this day. He made the story come alive, so that it might give life. This was his goal—not the objective truth of the historian” (p. 20).

“Power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”

δύναμις *dunamis* and παρουσία *parousia*

Perhaps provide solution for problematic verses in the Synoptic Gospels—
Matt 16:28 = Mark 9:1 = Luke 9:27; perhaps Jesus speaking at that time
about his soon coming transfiguration

“Eyewitnesses of his majesty”

μεγαλειότης *megaleiotes*, “majesty, greatness”

Note difficulty for pseudepigraphal theory (cf. Bauckham, pp. 216-17)

vv. 17-18, God’s voice from heaven

Matt 17:5 = Mark 9:7 = Luke 9:35

Voice heard by three apostles

“Sacred mountain,” not implying later date for 2 Peter

Cf. holy Mt. Sinai or Mt. Zion, Exod 3:5; 15:13; Ps 2:6; 3:4; holy because
God revealed there

vv. 19-21, The more sure word of the Scriptures

v. 19, Word of the prophets: probably the whole OT

Comparative term βεβαιότερον *bebaioteron*, “more sure”

Cf. βέβαιος *bebaios*, “reliable, firm” (used already in v. 10)

Possible interpretations:

- 1) Prophecy more sure than eyewitness (KJV, ESV, Bigg, Green)
- 2) Prophecy made more sure by the eyewitness (RSV, NASB, NIV,
NRSV, NKJV, Mayor)
- 3) Absolute statement, not a comparison with anything in particular, “We
place very firm reliance on the prophetic word” (Bauckham)

It seems #1 fits best with the movement of the context; but other views are
possible, and do not lower Scripture at all, since Peter himself was an
authoritative and inspired apostle.

Light shining in a dark place; Scriptures bring holiness from sin

Day dawns and morning star rises

Probably refers to second coming of Christ (Green, p. 88)

“In your hearts” possibly could go with next verse (not in Eng. translations)

vv. 20-21, Manner of Scripture’s production

Private interpretation

NIV, “by the prophet’s own interpretation”

The context is in favor of showing how the Scriptures are reliable. The prophets were not speaking for themselves, or giving their private judgments about events around them or events to come. Rather, they were speaking from God, and are thus a firm foundation for faith.

This passage cannot support the Roman Catholic belief that the church as a whole is the infallible interpreter of Scripture, and that private judgment in exegesis must be surrendered.

Origin of Scripture not in man’s will

Similar to salvation

“Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit”

Text variant, “men spoke from God” (UBS {A}), not “holy men of God spoke” (KJV)

Capital letters for *apo*, “from,” and *hagioi*, “holy ones,” are very similar (Bigg, p. 270); capital (Uncial) letters used in early MSS for several centuries:

<i>apo</i>	ἀπό	ΑΠΟ
<i>hagioi</i>	ἅγιοι	ΑΓΙΟΙ

[See discussion in Metzger, *Textual Commentary* 632]

“Carried along,” φερόμενοι *pheromenoi*; cf. Acts 27:15, 17

3. *False teachers, ch. 2*

Since Peter desires to protect the Christians against pitfalls they will meet, he begins with warning them against false teachers who will arise in the church (cf. Acts 20:29-31). The Christians must maintain their position on the foundation of godliness and of Scripture, in order to resist these false teachers.

(Similarities with Jude; it seems that Peter is using Jude, simplifying it somewhat, leaving out details of particulars)

vv. 1-3, Prediction of false teachers

v. 1, Certainty of their coming

“Destructive heresies” = divisions in the church caused by false teaching, which results in damnation

Denying the Lord who bought them

Possible explanations:

Arminian — universal atonement

Calvinistic — the Lord who (they claim) has bought them; or, the Lord who bought them in a general sense, showing them some spiritual truth (as 2 Pet 2:20; Heb. 6; cf. Douglas W. Kennard, “Petrine Redemption: Its Meaning and Extent,” *JETS* 30:4 [Dec. 87] 399-405, who says redeem = free from some sin temporarily); or, false teachers are Jewish by race, whom the Lord bought from Egypt (John Gill)

Swift destruction (theme of most of the chapter)

vv. 2-3, Popularity in the church, yet rejected by God

vv. 4-9, Examples of others who did not escape judgment

v. 4, Fallen angels

ταρταρώ *tartaro*, consign to Tartarus (lower than Hades in Greek mythology)

Held in gloomy dungeons, fate of some fallen angels (cf. Luke 8:31); held in chains in Jude 6

v. 5, Sinners in days of Noah; Noah a preacher of righteousness, but spared eight people

vv. 6-8, Sinners in Sodom and Gomorrah

Gen 18-19

vv. 7-8, Righteousness of Lot

Not recorded in OT, and not in Jude

v. 9, General principle applicable to all times

vv. 10-12, Boldness and arrogance of false teachers

Slander even angels

Contrasting humility of the angels

Jude 9 perhaps quotes the lost ending of the *Testament of Moses* (also called the *Assumption of Moses*) at this point

vv. 13-16, Motivation of the false teachers

v. 13, Carousing

“Feasting with you,” probably Lord’s Supper (UBS {B}, instead of “love-feasts,” as in Jude 12)

v. 14, Adultery, greed (greed also in v. 3)

vv. 15-16, Example of greed of Balaam: Num 22-25, greed and recommendation of immorality (Num 31:16)

vv. 17-22, Emptiness of their teaching

v. 17, Waterless springs, rainless clouds

v. 18, Empty, boastful words

Appeal to baser instincts

vv. 19-22, Resulting in greater slavery to sin

v. 19, False freedom

v. 20, Principle of returning to former corruption

v. 21, Better off before

v. 22, Two proverbs: Prov 26:11 for the first one

Prov 26:11, As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his folly.

Dogs and pigs, both unclean (cf. Matt 7:6)

Note the comments of Michael Green on the appropriateness of this chapter: “Covetousness, sophisticated arguments, pride in knowledge, gluttony, drunkenness, lust, arrogance against authority of all kinds, and, most of all, the danger of denying the lordship of the Redeemer—are these not all the paramount temptations of money-mad, sex-mad, materialistic, anti-authoritarian, twentieth-century man?” (rev. ed. p. 133)

4. *The day of the Lord, 3:1-16*

In addition to false teachers within the church, Peter predicts that there will be scoffers outside the church, who will ridicule the Christian’s hope in the coming of Christ. Since that hope is so important for Christian faith and life (cf. 1 Peter), Peter spends considerable space defending its reality.

a. *The time of the Lord’s coming, 3:1-9*

vv. 1-2, Purpose of 2 Peter

“Second letter,” probably 1 Peter the first; Zahn thinks another letter

“Your apostles,” apostles given to the church

vv. 3-4, Accusation made by the scoffers

“Fathers died,” probably the patriarchs

Uninterrupted uniformitarianism (forgets catastrophes, like the flood; normal providence in actual history includes both gradual processes and catastrophic interruptions)

vv. 5-7, Example of Noah's flood

Same quality of unexpectedness for the final judgment

Judgment of fire, v. 12

vv. 8-9, Explanation of the delay in Christ's coming

Peter faces the problem of "the delay of the Parousia"

v. 8, 1000 years = 1 day

Ps 90:4 (Psalm of Moses), For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.

No mention of chiliasm; unlikely in a 2nd century writing (cf. Green, p. 34, n. 3)

v. 9, Purpose of the delay, to save the elect

"You" = Christians; "anyone" goes to "you"

b. The results of the Lord's coming, 3:10-13

v. 10, Coming as a thief, unexpected (Matt 24:36-44)

Heavens disappear (Matt 24:29; Rev 6:14)

Elements destroyed

Everything laid bare

Textual variant:

εὐρεθήσεται *heurethesetai*, will be laid bare (lit. "will be found") (UBS {D}; NIV)

κατακαήσεται *katakaesetai*, will be burned up

v. 11, Resulting holy behavior we should have

vv. 12-13, Destruction of old age brings in new age

Speed his coming; cf. Matt 24:14

New heaven and new earth

“His promise”: Isa 65:17-25; 66:22-24; Rev 21-22

Seems to include the millennium, and the future ages as well

Main feature: righteousness (as Isa 60:19-21)

c. Our waiting for the Lord’s coming, 3:14-16

vv. 14-15a, Christian’s hope produces holiness and patience

“Our Lord’s patience” – objective or subjective? In this context, seems subjective—the patience the Lord has before returning; this requires patience on our part, which the Lord supplies (as already taught in 1-2 Peter)

2 Pet 3:15, And remember, the Lord is waiting so that people have time to be saved. This is just as our beloved brother Paul wrote to you with the wisdom God gave him. (NLT)

vv. 15b-16, Paul’s teaching

“Our dear brother Paul,” good terms of friendship

“Speaking of these matters,” e.g., 1 & 2 Thessalonians

“Hard to understand”

“The other Scriptures”

Peter and his readers recognize Paul’s epistles as Scripture, on an equal footing with the OT. This happened during Paul’s lifetime (cf. 2 Cor 10:10; 2 Thess 2:2; 3:17).

5. Concluding exhortation, 3:17-18

v. 18, “Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”—the same rule as at 1:1 (God and Savior)