

Second Peter

Imagine Peter as an older man and respected leader in the church living in Rome. He writes, “this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking.” (3:1). His first letter addressed the problem of persecution. However, in this second letter, the problem is internal; there are false teachers in the church. Therefore, this letter warns those disciples who “are firmly established in the truth” not to be persuaded to abandon the faith (1:12). Peter’s appeal is urgent since he knows his death is imminent (1:12–15).

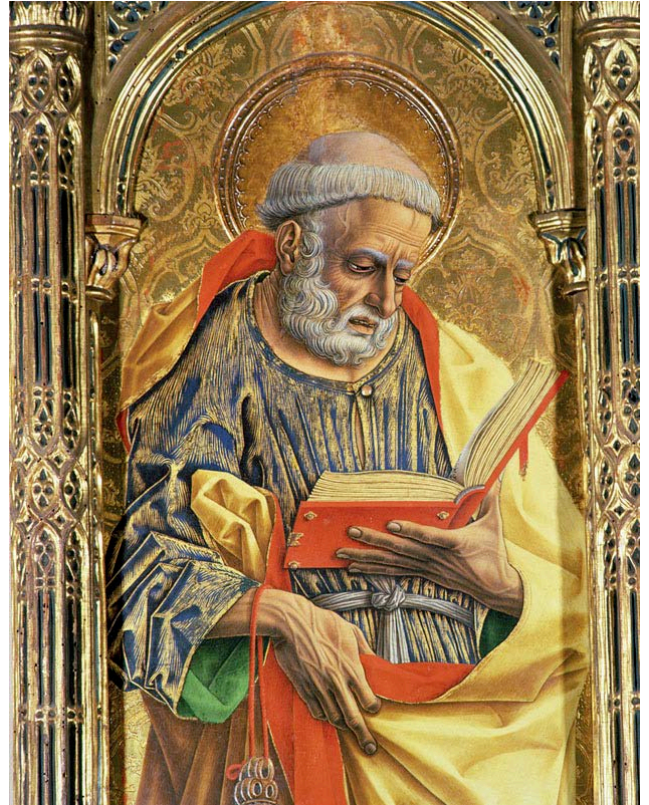
Writer: The Apostle Peter, or possibly compiled by one of Peter’s disciples, maybe even after his death.

Date of writing: Between 62-69 AD

Original Audience: The letter begins by saying it is to those who ‘have received a faith as precious as ours,’ which would be for a large audience, possibly the churches throughout the Roman Empire (1:1). Later, however, the author says that this is ‘my second letter to you,’ implying it is for the same audience as 1 Peter, meaning the churches in Asia Minor.

The Reason for the Letter: Peter wants to establish the believers in their faith and godly living while warning them of the false teachers. Peter may have intended this to be a final goodbye letter since the Lord made it clear that he would die soon (1:14-15).

The Main Message of the Letter: Peter is worried about the influence of false teachers, but he tells the church that God has provided believers with everything necessary for a godly life (1:3-4). Therefore, Peter urges the believers to be focused and intentional in doing what is right (1:5–8) so they can confirm their “calling and election” (1:10). Peter says his death is near, and he is writing to them so that, after he is gone, they will be able to remember those things that they know to be true (1:12–15). He was a witness to the transfiguration of Jesus (Luke 9:28-36), which confirms the truth of Jesus’ power (1:16–21). Peter says that false teachers will arise in the church giving destructive teaching and encouraging evil works (2:1–3). He provides a brief history of God’s judgment on the wicked to show that these false teachers will also be condemned (2:3–10). Peter says these teachers are greedy, immoral, evil people who promise freedom but give slavery (2:10–22). Peter reminds the readers to hold fast to the tradition delivered to them by prophets and apostles (3:1–2). Finally, he talks about the second coming of Jesus (3:3–9) and encourages the readers to live in anticipation of the glorious salvation that it will bring (3:10–13). The letter concludes with a few final encouragements and words of praise to Jesus (3:14–18).



An artist's imagination of Peter in his last years

Outline of 2 Peter:

1. Greetings, and call to holiness (1:1–11)
2. Encouragement to remember the apostle's true teaching (1:12–21)
3. Warning of false teachers and false prophets (2:1–22)
4. The timing of Jesus' second coming (3:1–13)
5. Encouragement to perseverance (3:14–18)

Godliness

One of the main themes in 2 Peter is godliness. Peter tells us that the world is a dark place (1:19); it has been corrupted by evil desires (1:4), and it is full of lawlessness (2:7–8).

However, followers of Jesus can escape from this corruption (1:4) and live in the good way God wants us to live (1:5–9). How is this possible? Peter says that "God's power gives us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness" (1:2–3). So, Peter tells us there is a close connection between knowing and doing. First, we have to know the truth about God, His Kingdom, and who we are in His Kingdom. Then, based on that knowledge, we can live a holy life by the power of God's Holy Spirit.

The Delay of Jesus' Second Coming

In chapter 3 it seems that some people were saying that Jesus was slow in coming again. They were saying that Jesus promised to come again but where is he? (3:4). Peter responds to these people with three things:

1. The promise of Jesus' return does not come from some made-up stories (1:16). Instead, this teaching comes from the actual experiences of the apostles, like Peter, who saw Jesus transfigured before him (1:17–18). When Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James, and John "His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light" (Matthew 17:1-2). Peter might have understood this as a preview of Jesus' second coming. In the same way, when John saw Jesus in his vision of the last days, he describes Jesus saying "His face was like the sun, shining in all its brilliance." (Revelation 1:16).
2. The fulfillment of the promise appears to be slow in coming only when viewed from a human point of view. However, "with the Lord, one day is like a thousand years" (3:8). Our lives on this earth are very short, but God has no beginning or end. He understands time very differently from us.
3. Jesus has not returned yet because God is merciful and wants to give more people a chance to repent (3:9). This last point leads to the surprising conclusion that humans can make the Lord Jesus come back more quickly. While we wait for Jesus to come again, we are to live holy lives and share the Good News about Jesus with everyone around us. When the whole world has heard the message, the end will come (Matthew 24:14).

Read through the whole letter one time. Then, go back and read each section in the outline above at least two more times and discuss the following questions:

1. What do we learn about God and His Kingdom?
2. What do we learn about who we are in God's Kingdom?
3. Based on this knowledge, how do we need to live?
4. Who can I share this with?