

Who wrote 1 and 2 Peter, two letters of the 27 books of the New Testament? Many critics say that they were written by a pseudonymous writer, or writers, falsely claiming to be the apostle Peter, and especially is this said about 2 Peter.



“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ . . . ” (1 Peter 1:1). “ . . . as a fellow presbyter and witness to the sufferings of Christ” (1 Peter 5:1

NAB). The writer of 1 Peter clearly identifies himself by name as “Peter”, and also “an *apostle* of Jesus Christ” that is, one of Christ’s original 11 faithful apostles, and “as a fellow *presbyter*”, that is, an older, mature Christian man, having the position in the church of “elder” (1 Peter 5:1 most translations), and as a “*witness* to the sufferings of Christ”, meaning he was actually there in person alongside Christ when Jesus was on earth. These descriptions fit the apostle Peter.

Who wrote 1 and 2 Peter? Did the apostle Peter?

“Symeon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith of equal value to ours” (2 Peter 1:1 NAB). The opening verse of 2 Peter attributes its writing to the same apostle Peter as the first letter does. Notice the name “Symeon”. This is the same Hebrew name used to describe him when, **“The apostles and the presbyters met together”** and **“James responded, ‘ . . . Symeon has described how God first concerned himself with acquiring from among the Gentiles a people for his name”**

(Acts 15:6, 13-15 NAB). Obviously, the apostle Peter is referred to here by the same name he uses to introduce his second letter.

“This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you” (2 Peter 3:1 NAB). The writer of 2 Peter clearly says this is the second letter he is writing, which implies that 1 Peter is the first letter he wrote.

“We had been eyewitnesses of his majesty . . . We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven while we were with him on the holy mountain” (2 Peter 1:16-18 NAB). The writer of 2 Peter counts himself as an ‘eyewitness’ who was present at Jesus’ transfiguration. The gospel writers Matthew, Mark and Luke place Peter at the Transfiguration scene (Matthew 17:1-11; Mark 9:2-11; Luke 9:28-36).

The writer of 2 Peter says, **“our Lord Jesus Christ has shown me that I must soon leave this earthly life” (2 Peter 1:14 NLT).** Only the apostle Peter could have made such a statement (John 21:18,19), keeping in mind Jesus’ prediction from 35-40 years past.

Saying, **“our beloved brother Paul” (2 Peter 3:15),** suggests a close relationship with the apostle Paul, which fits the apostle Peter.

Critics, however, have generated more controversy over the writership and canonicity of 2 Peter than any other book of the New Testament.

Early Church Views of the Writership of Peter’s Letters

First and Second Peter both claim writership by Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1,17-18), and “a fellow elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed” (1 Peter 5:1). The early church unhesitatingly received 1 Peter as authentic, and there is also some evidence of the acceptance of 2 Peter as authentic. Some examples are as follows, but notice the proof of the very early acceptance of

both 1 and 2 Peter as authentic:

- Papias (60- 135 CE), about 110 CE, noted that “Mark is mentioned by Peter in his first epistle” [Eusebius, *History*, 2.15]. (1 Peter 5:13).
- Clement of Rome (30-101 CE), about 95 CE, in 1 Clement, paraphrased 2 Peter 3:1-4
- *The Didache* (an anonymous, early-second-century CE work dealing with a variety of doctrinal and practical matters of import to the early Christian church) about 95 CE, cited 1 Peter 2:11
- Papias, about 110 CE, cited 1 Peter
- Polycarp (69-156 CE), about 130 CE, cited 1 Peter.
- Justin Martyr, about 150 CE, cited 2 Peter 2:1
- Irenaeus (130-200 CE), about 180 CE, cited 1 Peter 1:18, using the apostle’s name [*Against Heresies*, 4.9.2; 4.16.5).
- Tertullian, about 200 CE, accepted that Peter wrote 1 Peter
- Clement of Alexandria, about 190 CE, accepted that Peter wrote 1 Peter, wrote a commentary on 2 Peter, which is now lost

The early Church viewed literary works which claimed to be written by an apostle, or one of their close associates, or which claimed to be scripture, in several ways (Eusebius, *History*, 3-25), which are:

1. Those recognized as genuine by all Christians (for example, 1 Peter);
2. Those that, though disputed by some, were still recognized as authentic by the church as a whole and were familiar to most Christians (for example, 2 Peter);
3. Non-canonical works that made no claim to being canonical;
4. Those that were generally acknowledged as outright heretical.

Second Letter Written Late in Peter’s Life

“For our Lord Jesus has shown me that I must soon leave this earthly life”—2 Peter 1:14 NIV

Second Peter was written late in Peter’s life, probably in the mid-60’s CE, as evidenced by the above statement of Peter. This deflates the critics claims that:

(1) there could not have been first and second generation Christians by this time, nor “scoffers” about the seeming delay of the Lord’s return (**2 Peter 3:2-4**); and

(2) Paul’s letters were not yet collected and viewed as “**scriptures**”, as **2 Peter 3:15,16** says they were.

In the mid-60’s CE, Christianity had been operative for about 35 years, which is more than adequate time to have produced second generation Christians. Of Paul’s 14 canonical letters, 13 were written by the early 60’s CE, and 2 Timothy was written in the mid-60’s CE. So at least 90% of Paul’s letters were already written, and most of them were likely circulating, by the mid-60’s CE, when 2 Peter was written. A leading church figure, such as the apostle Peter, would, in all likelihood, be familiar with them and some of the erroneous views of them, as indicated by **2 Peter 3:15,16**.

Contrary Critical Views Discussed and Debunked

Despite strong historical evidence supporting the apostle Peter as the one who wrote 1 and 2 Peter, some commentators hesitate to accept Peter’s writership for several reasons:

- Nero’s persecution of Christians in Rome (Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.44) set a precedent for Roman officials in all the provinces to consider Christians as criminals. First Peter includes several references to the persecution of Christians outside Rome (**1 Peter 1:6**; 2:15; 3:15-16; 4:12-13; 5:8-9). Since all scholars agree that Peter died during Nero’s reign (A.D. 64-68; cf Eusebius, *History*, 2.25), and since persecution outside of Rome

began after Nero's reign, many New Testament commentators hold that both 1 and 2 Peter (but, especially so 2 Peter) are pseudonymous works (falsely attributed to the apostle Peter). — Their language, however, does not necessarily refer to a large-scale, official persecution, and thus does not demand a date subsequent to Nero's reign. The suffering Peter referred to was local and sporadic rather than universal and under imperial mandate. Indeed, Peter spoke more of Christians suffering verbal abuse and social ostracism than he did of martyrdom. Another fact is, why would a pseudonymous false teacher/writer devote so much effort into warning against **“cleverly devised false stories”** and **“false teachers”** (2 Peter 1:16; 2:1)?

- The enormous geographical area represented by the audience addressed in 1 Peter 1:1 (for example, believers in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia) suggests to many scholars that these epistles were not composed until well after the 60s. They argue that enough time would have had to elapse after Paul's missionary journeys to allow for the growth of Christianity in these areas (especially since we have no record that Paul even visited Pontus, Cappadocia or Bithynia). — As reflected in the book of Acts and in Paul's letters, however, Christian churches were often founded in short periods of time, and Peter may have first met some of his readers when they came to Jerusalem at Pentecost (Acts 2:9-10).
- First and Second Peter both demonstrate a refined vocabulary and rich literary style. Since Peter and John are called “unschooled, ordinary men” in Acts 4:13, many think it unlikely that Peter would have possessed the skill to write these epistles. — However, the Greek word used in Acts 4:13 (*agrammatos*) most likely means something like “without an advanced education,” rather than “illiterate.” The Jews prided themselves upon the education of their children (cf. Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1.12; 2.26). Peter evidently lacked the Talmud, or “college” level of, training. However, as a businessman in the fishing industry, not just someone who caught fish, he would have had to know how to read, and probably would have been fluent in Greek, the international language of common, public discourse at that time. The picture of Peter that is frequently put forth today in popular expositions of Scripture—that is, the notion that he was something of a buffoon—is most certainly not true.

- The Greek of 1 Peter is much more polished than that of 2 Peter, and there are striking vocabulary differences between 1 and 2 Peter. Therefore, critics claim that each letter must have a different writer. 1 Peter 5:12 tells us that Silvanus, or Silas, assisted in the writing of the letter. **“I have written and sent this short letter to you with the help of Silas” (NLT)**. This indicates that Peter was not above seeking assistance to make certain his letters read well. This fact also deflates some of the criticism that there are significant stylistic differences between 1 and 2 Peter. Silvanus, or Silas, Peter’s secretary for his first letter, likely wrote down the details from Peter’s recollections in his own style. The vocabulary differences can be accounting for by considering the different subject matter of each letter.
- Some scholars claim that the false teaching referred to in 2 Peter is a form of Gnosticism that emerged decades after the apostle Peter’s lifetime, which, if true, would mean that Peter could not have written the letter. However, the false teaching that Peter exposes is not the full-blown Gnosticism that developed in the 2nd century, but, rather, erroneous ideas and actions that eventually led to such **(2 Peter 2)**.

Evidence in Favor of Peter’s Writership

The weight of evidence is in favor of the authenticity, that is, of Peter’s writership, of both of these two letters. In addition, the early church did not, on principle, approve of books written under false names. For example, the church father Tertullian (*On Baptism*, 17) indicated that the elder who wrote the pseudonymous Acts of Paul in order to augment “Paul’s fame” was defrocked, and the so-called *Gospel of Peter* of the 2nd century was criticized as false, pseudonymous (Eusebius, *History*, 6.12). The *Apocalypse of Peter*, or *Revelation of Peter*, was rejected as being a fake. Moreover, pseudonymous materials tend to be drastically different from 1 and 2 Peter.

While there are differences between 1 Peter and 2 Peter, there are actually great similarities in the vocabulary of 1 and 2 Peter. In fact, the differences between Peter’s two letters and the rest of the New Testament are much more profound than the differences between these two letters. Actually, there is no other extant writing that is as similar to 1 Peter as 2 Peter.

The differences that exist between the two letters can be explained by the differences in subject matter, the time, circumstances and purpose of writing, and the use of a scribe ([1 Peter 5:12](#)), or the lack thereof. First Peter was primarily written to help suffering Christians. Second Peter was written primarily to expose false teachers.

Similarities in Vocabulary and Expressions

—Between 1 Peter and 2 Peter

Identical opening salutation—**“May grace and peace be yours in abundance”** ([1 Peter 1:2 NAB](#); [2 Peter 1: NAB](#))

“Precious”—**“With *precious* blood of Christ”** ([1 Peter 1:19 NAB](#))

“The *precious* and very great promises” ([2 Peter 1:4 NAB](#))

“Witness”/“Eyewitness”—**“As a fellow . . . *witness* to the sufferings of Christ”** ([1 Peter 5:1 NAB](#))

“We were *eyewitness* of his majesty” ([2 Peter 1:16 NIV](#))

“Grace” in conclusion of letter—**“ . . . *testifying that this is the true grace of God*”** ([1 Peter 5:12 NAB](#))

“grow in grace . . . of our Lord Jesus Christ” ([2 Peter 3:18 NAB](#))

Refer to same Old Testament event, with—**“Noah”, “the ark”** ([1 Peter 3:18-21](#)), and the **“flood”** ([2 Peter 2:5](#))

—Between Unusual Words of 2 Peter and Peter’s Speeches in Acts

“Obtained”—2 Peter 1:1 NKJV: Acts 1:17 NKJV

“Godliness”—2 Peter 1:3,6,7; 3:11 NASB; Acts 3:12 HCSB

“Reward of unrighteousness”—2 Peter 2:13,15 LSV; Acts 1:18 LSV

Conclusion

The writership and canonicity of 1 Peter was virtually unquestioned by the early church writers, catalogers, and canons. Although there were some doubters, Second Peter was accepted as authentic, Scriptural, and canonical, without query, by such early authorities as Irenaeus (c 180), Origen (c 230), Eusebius (c 320), Cyril of Jerusalem (c 348), and Athanasius (c 367), Epiphanius (c 368), Gregory Nazianzus (c 370), Philaster (c 380), and Jerome (c 394), all prior to the Third Council of Carthage (397).

Based on all the evidence, we can conclude that Jesus’ apostle Peter wrote 1 and 2 Peter.

ONE SOURCE: NIV ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDY BIBLE