

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, which is arguably the most disputed book in the New Testament.



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

### Early Church's View of Literary Works

**“Words . . . by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:17 LSB; 2 Peter 3:2)** were considered to be authoritative. However, early Christians were advised to be cautious. **“MY beloved, do not believe every prophecy, but examine the prophecies to find out if they are of God: because many false prophets have appeared in the world” (1 John 4:1 Lamsa Bible).**

Therefore, the early Church viewed literary works which claimed to be written by an apostle, or one of their close associates, or that 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.

### Early Church's View of Pseudonymous Works

The early church did not accept a document as inspired by God simply because it had an apostle's or one of their close associates name on it.

**“We ask you . . . not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us — whether . . . by letter . . . Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way” (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 NIV).** Paul is referring to deceptive, pseudonymous works that were already circulating in the early 50’s.

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, as was the *Gnostic Apocalypse of Peter*. Moreover, pseudonymous materials tend to be drastically different from 1 and 2 Peter.

The *Gospel of Peter*, the *Apocalypse of Peter*, and the *Gnostic Apocalypse of Peter* were all three written far too late to have been written by the Apostle Peter, and they each blatantly contradict the 66 book Bible canon in a number of ways. A few examples of these contradictions are:

The so-called *Gospel of Peter* of the 2nd century records the cross itself, the instrument on which Jesus was executed, as talking. It contradicts the canonical gospels in a number of ways. For example, it exonerates Pilate of all responsibility for Jesus’ execution, and has Herod Antipas giving the order to execute Jesus, and has Jesus never dying at all, but being taken directly into heaven from his cross.

The *Apocalypse of Peter* has vivid descriptions of the pagan doctrine of hellfire, and the *Gnostic Apocalypse of Peter* portrays souls as being immortal, and Jesus fleshly body as not being real.

### **Internal Testimony of Peter’s Writership**

**“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ . . . ” (1 Peter 1:1). ” . . . as your fellow elder and witness to the sufferings of Christ” (1 Peter 5:1 LSB).** 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.

**“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, keeping in mind Jesus’ prediction from about 30 or so years past (John

21:18,19).

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

The contents of 2 Peter, unlike apocryphal and pseudepigraphal works, are in complete harmony with the all “**the rest of the Scriptures**” (2 Peter 3:16 LSB).

### **Early Church’s 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:

#### 1 Peter

- *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 2:1.
- Polycarp (69-156 CE), about 130 CE, cited 1 Peter.
- Tertullian, about 200 CE, accepted that Peter wrote 1 Peter.

#### 2 Peter

- Clement of Rome (30-101 CE), about 95 CE, in 1 Clement, paraphrased 2 Peter 3:1-4.
- Justin Martyr, about 150 CE, cited 2 Peter 2:1.
- Eusebius (263-339), in his compilation of church history, mentions that although 2 Peter was disputed by some, it was recognized as authoritative by many (*Hist. eccl.* 3.25).

## Both Letters

- Papias (60- 135 CE), about 110 CE, cited 1 Peter, and noted that “Mark is mentioned by Peter in his first epistle” [Eusebius, *History*, 2.15]. (1 Peter 5:13). The obvious implication is that Papias recognized 2 Peter as authentic.
- 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]. He also seems to have had access to 2 Peter, because he quotes 3:8 almost verbatim (*Haer.* 5.23.2).
- Clement of Alexandria, about 190 CE, accepted that Peter wrote 1 Peter, wrote a commentary on 2 Peter, which is now lost.

### Second Letter Written Late in Peter’s Life

Second Peter was written late in Peter’s life, probably in the mid-60’s CE, as evidenced by the following statement of Peter. **“For our Lord Jesus has shown me that I must soon leave this earthly life” (2 Peter 1:14 NIV)**. There is some evidence that Peter died in the late 60’s. This deflates the critics claims that:

(1) there could not have been first and second generation Christians by this time, nor could there be “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 Peter indicates they were. **“Our beloved brother Paul . . . wrote to you also in all his letters” (2 Peter 3:15,16 LSB)**.

Peter speaks of this collection of the apostle Paul and Paul’s letters as if Paul and his letters were common knowledge. 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. Letters to these early churches were not only **“read”** by the recipient church, but they were also quickly copied and circulated to other churches for their reading **“Colossians 4:16)**. Thirteen of Paul’s 14 canonical letters were already written by the early 60’s CE, and 2

Timothy was written in the mid-60's CE. by the time Peter wrote his 2nd letter, over 90% of Paul's letters had already been written, and most of them were likely widely circulating by the mid-60's CE, when 2 Peter was written. A leading church figure, such as the apostle Peter, would have been familiar with Paul's letters, and also some of the erroneous views of them, as indicated by **2 Peter 3:15,16**.

### Contrary Critical Views Discussed and Debunked

Critics, however, have generated more controversy over the writership and canonicity of 2 Peter than any other book of the New Testament. However, **2 Peter** views the men who wrote "**scripture**" being "**moved by the holy Spirit spoke under the influence of God**" (**2 Peter 1:21 NAB**). The letter emphasizes "**truth**" (**2 Peter 1:12; 2:2**), and warns about "**false teachers**" (**2 Peter 2:1**).

A pseudonymous writing is difficult to reconcile with this high view of scripture. A comparison with uninspired apocryphal works illustrates the stark differences. For example, "*I will bring my work to an end here too. If it is well written and to the point, that is what I wanted; if it is poorly done and mediocre, that is the best I could do*" (*2 Maccabees 15:37,38 NAB*).

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”, “illiterate and ignorant” (Douay)** 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, not only Hebrew and Aramaic, but also 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, an ignorant illiterate fisherman—is most certainly not true. The Galilee area was an international crossroads, with Peter likely have business

dealings with people who spoke various languages.

- 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. However, Peter's use of Greek philosophical terms and concepts in **2 Peter** is evidence that the subject is more complex than that. For example, Peter used: "**excellence**" (*arete*) (**2 Peter 1:3 LSB**), "**divine nature**" (*theios physis*), and "**Tartarus**" (*tartarosoas*) (**2 Peter 1:4 NAB**). Galilee was influenced by Hellenism and Greek culture, so it's not surprising that Peter would be familiar with Greek philosophical terms. Using these terms wouldn't require a study of Greek philosophy and classics, and Peter didn't use the terms in a technical sense.
- **1 Peter 5:12** tells us that Silvanus (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 in **1 Peter**. The vocabulary differences can also be accounted for by considering the different subject matter of each letter. **1 Peter** is primarily written to encourage Christians who were suffering for their faith (**1 Peter 1:6; 3:14**), whereas **2 Peter** is primarily written to warn Christians about false teachers. But, in **2 Peter**, Peter also gives a farewell address because he knows his death is near (**2 Peter 1:12-15**).
- 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 Gnosticism (**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.

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 entire 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 the 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**

SIMILAR THEMES IN 1 and 2 PETER

1. Divine inspiration of the Hebrew Scriptures — **1 Peter 1:10-12; 2 Peter 1:19-21**
2. God’s calling and choosing Christians —**1 Peter 1:1,2 LSB; 2 Peter 1:10 LSB**
3. New birth — **1 Peter 1:3,4 NRSV; NAB; 2 Peter 1:4**
4. Holiness/Godliness —**1 Peter 1:16; 2:11,12; 2 Peter 1:6,7 LSB**
5. Noah and family protected from flood — **1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5**
6. Immorality and judgement — **1 Peter 4:2-5; 2 Peter 2:10-22**
7. Exhortation to Christian living — **1 Peter 4:7-1; 2 Peter 3:14-18**
8. Doxology, an expression of praise and glory — **1 Peter 4:11; 2 Peter 3:18**

## **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 both 1 and 2 Peter.

ONE SOURCE: NIV ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDY BIBLE