

INTRODUCTION TO II PETER

Message #1

Various Texts

Any person God chose to ever do anything for Him was nothing more than a sinful human. This was true of all men He chose to be leaders and kings, priests and prophets and apostles. **But of all the men that Jesus chose to be one of His own apostles, the one who seemed to be most human was Peter.**

When you track information about the apostles, Peter was not your average man. He spoke more than the other apostles when Jesus was here, and Jesus spoke more to Peter than to the other apostles when He was here.

One of the most wonderful thoughts that we can ever have is the thought that God has forgiven me of all of my sin. Think of the ramifications of that staggering reality. But perhaps even a more amazing thought is the thought that God has actually forgiven me and trusted me again even after I have sinned as a believer. Just think of the potential of being greatly used by God for powerful purposes when, as a believer, you have sinned against God. That is exactly the story of the life of the Apostle Peter.

Peter's life at times had been a roller coaster of a ride. He was emotional and explosive. He was loud and assertive. David Helm said that he imagined Peter as being an "assertive man who is always sweating," a "headstrong, unbridled hulk who was always getting into trouble ..." (*I & II Peter & Jude*, p. 184). He was a big, strong, tough, rugged man and he is the man God chose.

Peter was up and down and at times all over the map in his relationship with God. But over time Peter had become a rock-solid apostle. His final years of life were zeroed in on doing God's will, and when he wrote II Peter we get to see what was on his mind just before he died.

Just as II Timothy was the final letter Paul wrote before he died, so II Peter is the final letter Peter wrote before he died. In both of these personal letters we get to see what the Spirit of God had impressed on these great apostles. Peter saw a storm coming and he wrote II Peter to help stop the storm and give stability in the midst of it. In the next weeks, we would like to take you on a journey through II Peter.

Now to begin our journey we would like to ask and answer four critical introductory questions:

INTRODUCTORY QUESTION #1 – Why study II Peter?

Let me present five reasons why we need to study II Peter.

Reason #1 - Because II Peter is one of only 66 inspired books that God gave to man.

Here is all the reason we ever need to study any book of the Bible - because it is a book in the Bible. Very few people carefully study any inspired book and, of those who do, most don't study II Peter.

William Barclay once wrote, “Second Peter is one of the neglected books of the New Testament. Very few people will claim to have read it, still less to have studied it in detail” (*The Letters of James and Peter*, p. 283). Lewis Donelson said that II Peter “has occupied a somewhat secondary status in Christian discussions” (*II Peter*, p. 207).

Probably one reason why this has happened is that among all of the books of the N.T., this book is the one that has been disputed the most as actually being an inspired book. It has somewhat of an “awkward entry into the canon” (*Ibid.*, p. 207). But when all is studied on the subject, Kenneth Gangel said it well when he said, “For more than 17 centuries this brief but poignant epistle has withstood the blasts of authenticity ...” (*II Peter*, p. 859). Albert Barnes, a Presbyterian preacher of the 1800s, made an interesting observation when he said although the book may have been doubted, “it does not appear to have been rejected by any one” (*The Second Epistle of Peter*, p. 1437).

Whenever a book of the Bible is disputed, it typically stems from liberals trying to deny the Scriptures. However, because of the unique style of Greek used in II Peter, some who love the Lord and the Word have even questioned this. For example, Jerome, the Biblical scholar of the late A.D. 300’s, saw the difference in Greek. But the truth is, when one examines all the evidence, there is no reason for the dispute. We offer four factual evidences that II Peter is God’s book.

Evidentiary Fact #1 - The early church fathers .

The fact that II Peter is one of God’s inspired books may be established by the various early Church fathers who said it was inspired or quoted from it - Clement of Rome (A.D. 95-97), Cyril of Jerusalem (A.D. 315-86), Jerome (A.D. 340-420) and Augustine (A.D. 400).

Evidentiary Fact #2 - The canon listings.

II Peter was listed in two canon listings of inspired books - Apostolic Canon (A.D. 300) and the Athanasius Canon (A.D. 367).

Evidentiary Fact #3 - The church council conclusions.

It was deemed to be an inspired book in the Bible by three church council meetings - Hippo (393) and Carthage (397 and 419).

Evidentiary Fact #4 - The manuscript preservation.

Two of the most important collections of papyrus manuscripts of the New Testament are that of two men: 1) Chester Beatty of London (1930-31); and 2) M. Martin Bodmer of Geneva (1955-56).

The earliest known copy of II Peter is Mr. Bodmer’s papyrus manuscript 72. This manuscript dates to the third century and contains both I and II Peter on a small manuscript that measures 6 by 5¾ inches. This manuscript proves that II Peter was accepted as canonical.

Also Mr. Bodmer's manuscript p74 contains II Peter on papyrus pages that measure 13 by 8 inches (Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, pp. 40-41). Clearly God preserved II Peter with very important manuscript evidence.

Marchant King said that it was Mr. Bodmer who established that the manuscript of II Peter should be given equal care and respect as I Peter (Marchant King, *Notes On the Bodmer Manuscript*, Bib. Sac., Vol. 121, No. 481, pp. 54-57).

Even though there may have been a couple of doubters, the truth is, the evidence proves II Peter is one of God's 66 inspired books.

Reason #2 - Because II Peter is a book that promotes moral and sexual purity.
1:5; 2:2, 6-7, 10, 18

As we journey through II Peter you will see that there were people who pretended to be very religious and very pious, who were involved in all kinds of sexual immorality. Peter specifically targets the false religious leaders who are immoral, lying frauds heading to the judgment of God. They not only are immoral themselves, they entice others to be as well.

You and I are living in a very sensual and immoral time and if we do not have proper spiritual principles and scruples, we can be taken captive by immoral things and we can end up costing ourselves an abundant entrance into heaven (**1:9, 11**). II Peter is a book that confronts those "believers" who are given to sensuality and greed and are saying it is acceptable. This book will flat out state that this kind of person "denies the Lord who bought them" (**2:1**).

This book will force you to ask yourself, "What does my moral lifestyle actually look like in the sight of God?" "What is my own personal, private morality?" "Do I have moral integrity?"

When Peter wrote II Peter, many people, who went to church, who claimed to be Christians, some of whom were leaders in the church, were given to illicit and immoral sexual activity and even homosexuality (**2:6-7, 10, 14**). This book will challenge us to realize Jesus Christ will return and we had better keep our morality within the context of what is Biblically right and pure.

II Peter will warn us not to treat sin lightly and it will specifically warn us never to fall into a form of thinking that assumes an immoral lifestyle may be pursued without any future penalty of God.

Reason #3 - Because II Peter is a book that targets false ministers and false prophets. **2:1ff.**

Probably this is one reason why II Peter is not a popular book. It pulls no punches when it comes to false teachers and false prophets. They are heretics. They are immoral. They are greedy. They are arrogant. They are slaves of corruption. They are dogs who return to their own vomit. II Peter is a book that makes any false teacher and false prophet squirm. It is hard-hitting.

What this will do for us is cause us to want to carefully understand God's written and inspired Word so we may spot false things and false teachers. Any deviation from this focus may lead in ways that are very dangerous.

Reason #4 - Because II Peter is a book that stresses the importance of deep knowledge of the Word of God.

A word that shows up many times in II Peter is the word “knowledge” or “know” (1:2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 12, 14, 16, 20; 2:9, 21, 21; 3:3, 17, 18). It becomes obvious that God wants His people very knowledgeable of His Word. In fact, the word “knowledge” or “know” used in the darkened numbers is the Greek word (επιγνωσκω) which means knowledge upon knowledge. **It is imperative that we not be shallow in our knowledge of God’s Word and about doctrine pertaining to Jesus Christ.**

It is solid knowledge of God’s Word that means we will be steadfast and stable in our faith. Even as the book opens, it is obvious that grace and peace are multiplied to us by a depth level of knowledge of the Word of God (1:2).

If we keep in our minds that Peter is about to die, he is revealing to us the critical importance of knowing God’s Word to make us spiritual, fruitful, and stable. He wants us knowing “first” the importance of knowing the inspired Scriptures (1:20).

Proper knowledge of the Word of God, deep knowledge of the Word of God is incredibly relevant to our day and age. Perhaps there is no greater need in this world right now than the need of direction. We are living in an insecure world and are surrounded by insecure people and religious imbeciles. This world needs sound direction and God’s Word gives direction, and God’s people need to know God’s Word at a depth level so they can demonstrate true stability.

Reason #5 - Because II Peter is a book that gives us the hope that we may be greatly used by God even after we have failed.

One of the reasons why you fall in love with Peter is because he had his own moments of frailties and setbacks, but he faced them and dealt with them and went on to become a great apostle. When Peter first met Jesus Christ, he was a tough, rugged, worldly man. He was uneducated, emotional, unstable, and sinful. He liked to party and drink and pursue things immoral and idolatrous (I Peter 4:3). But by the time he writes II Peter, he is rock solid and stable and godly. Even though there were some moments in his Christian life when the flesh got the better of him, such as when he denied the Lord three times, Peter is a man who proves you can get back up and go on to become a great man or woman of God. Peter tells us all that God can use us even when our track record hasn’t been the best.

QUESTION #2 – Who wrote II Peter?

The first two words of the text are two proper nouns that say that it was written by “Simon, Peter” (Συμεων Πετρος). If that isn’t enough, the very next words say that he was “a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ” (δουλος και αποστολος Ιησου Χριστου). This seems very clear and obvious to me. There is no grammar you could have used in the Greek language that would make this any plainer. **II Peter says in the first verse, it was written by the Apostle Peter.**

What seems almost insane to me is that there are some who have actually questioned this. I had to chuckle when I read the words of one skeptic who said, “II Peter claims to be written by Simon Peter” and then he goes on to say that few “admit such to be the case” (Donelson., p. 208). There are those who deny Peter being the author for six reasons:

- 1) The Greek is a different style than I Peter. The simple solution is that I Peter was written by Peter’s secretary, Silvanus (**I Peter 5:12**), and II Peter was written by Peter himself.

When we were on vacation, I decided to grammatically diagram the entire book of II Peter in Greek. I don’t know how many others have done this, but this does put me in a position to somewhat analyze how the various clauses of II Peter relate and connect to each other. One grammatical observation that I have discovered about II Peter is that the writer often uses a bunch of subordinate clauses that ultimately connect to some verb later (**i.e. II Peter 2:4-9**). When I compare this grammatical structure with the way Peter spoke, it is identical (**Acts 2:22-23**). II Peter also uses a main verb and then several subordinate clauses to develop it in almost a rambling kind of way (**II Peter 3:1-2**). Again, I find this indicative of the way he spoke (**Acts 3:19-21**). **From what I am able to grammatically glean, I have no doubt that II Peter was written by the Apostle Peter.**

- 2) The false teaching described in II Peter didn’t really surface until the second century. The simple solution is this is not true. Every type of false teaching was in the first century.
- 3) Paul’s letters could not have been circulated by the time Peter wrote II Peter (**II Peter 3:15-16**). This is simply not true. Many of Paul’s letters were copied and circulated (**Colossians 4:16**).
- 4) References to teachings from apostles put the book later than Peter’s time (**II Peter 3:2**). The apostles’ teachings were widely known in the first century.

In the earliest days of the Christian church after an apostolic letter was sent to a church or individual, copies would be made in order to make it possible for other churches and individuals to have it. This explains why there are a few textual variations. It is inevitable when you have so many copies that there would be a few manuscript discrepancies. During the early days of Christianity many copies in Greek were made of the apostolic writings.

The bigger cities wanted copies of “local texts,” and as a result they became a headquarters for a variety of manuscripts: Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, Carthage, and Rome became somewhat of a headquarters. The point is many copies were in existence.

- 5) There was some doubt about whether II Peter belonged in the Bible. There is a wealth of evidence that it did belong in the Bible.
- 6) II Peter is a book that presents heroic truth about a guy who wants you to think he is Peter. This is nothing more than theoretical, non-provable false, hypothetical stupidity.

None of these arguments make any sense. **The clear inspired statement of God is that II Peter was written by the Apostle Peter.**

QUESTION #3 – When did Peter write II Peter?

In II Peter 1:13-14, Peter says that the time of his death was “imminent.” When Jesus Christ was here on earth, He told Peter that He would die and even alluded to how He would die (**John 21:18-19**). Obviously God had revealed to him that his time was near.

It is most likely that Peter was martyred by Nero. Albert Barnes said that “Ecclesiastical history informs us that he died at Rome, A.D. 66, in the 12th year of the reign of Nero” (pre. cit., p. 1438).

Douglas Moo writes, “Early and, it seems, generally reliable tradition has it that Peter perished, with Paul, in the persecution of the Emperor of Nero in Rome” (*II Peter*, p. 22). Historical tradition says he was crucified with his head downward.

If Peter was about 30 when he first met Jesus Christ in A.D. 29-30, he was about 66 or 67 years old when He died, and **he wrote II Peter around A.D. 65-66 about one year before he died.**

QUESTION #4 – What is the theme of II Peter?

It is very clear from reading II Peter that the most specific and lengthy textual point that Peter addresses is the subject of false religious teachers. II Peter is a three chapter book and all of chapter two is devoted to addressing the subject of God-mocking, false religious teachers and heretics who are greedy and immoral, and teaching people this was an acceptable lifestyle.

This book is not so much written because the believers were suffering persecution or sufferings, but it was written to warn them about false teachers who were leading people into a dangerous theology and lifestyle.

When we travel completely through II Peter, it is very obvious that Peter was very concerned about believers personally growing in grace and knowledge so that they could have an abundant entrance into heaven, and so they could spot and combat these religious heretics and the lifestyle they were promoting.

The theme of II Peter is this: **God’s people are to grow in grace and knowledge so they can live godly in a lust-crazed world and spot, avoid, and combat religious heretics and false teachers on earth, and so they can gain eternal praise in heaven.**

God does not want His people shallow lightweights when it comes to knowing His Word. He wants us deep. He wants us grounded and mature. He wants us knowing how to live in the present and what to believe about the future. He wants us so knowledgeable of God’s Word that we can spot a phony instantly. In the next weeks we will take a trip through II Peter, and if you purpose to go with us through the journey, you will “grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ” (**II Peter 3:18**).