

## Final Instructions II Peter Overview

When was the last letter you wrote?  
 What did you write about?  
 To whom was it sent?  
 Why did you send it?  
 If it were to be your last letter what would you say?

I was curious to know about some last letters were written by people knowing they were about to die.

There was a letter from a Japanese kamikaze pilot written on the eve of his final mission. He encouraged his two small children to mind their mother, study hard, and grow to be fine Japanese persons. He spoke about the honor of finishing off the enemy and that his two sons should rise above him and avenge his death.

Wild Bill Hickok had a premonition that Deadwood would be his last camp and wrote a letter to his wife Agnes. He said that with his last breath he would call out her name and take the plunge hoping to swim to the other shore.

Melissa Nathan was a comic romance novelist from the UK writing to her husband and three year old son just before her death from cancer. She praised her husband and thanked him for being her rock and friend. She spoke of the imprint her son had made on her life and would remember him wherever it was she was going. To her son she added this “Go into the world knowing that while you were everything to your mother, you won’t have to deal with an annoying woman who can’t stop kissing you when you’re 15. I will be in the sky kissing you from afar.”

Perhaps the best last letter I read came from the hand of Jacob Vowell and his son Elbert. They were among 216 miners who were killed in a coal mine explosion in 1902. Only a handful survived the blast. Jacob and his son along with those

remaining few would, in time, succumb to the lack of oxygen. He had enough strength to write to his wife Ellen and say goodbye. He wanted her to live right and come to heaven and trust the Lord. He wrote that Elbert, who was with him, trusted the Lord and wanted his Mom to meet him in heaven.

They are sad letters for sure, most filled with uncertainty about what lay ahead following their last breath. Only that last letter expressed any hope through faith in the Lord.

As we begin a new study in II Peter, this is a last letter. We read in 1:13-14 that Peter knew he didn’t have much time left on earth. There must have been an escalation in persecution for Peter to draw that conclusion though we don’t know if he is writing from prison or expecting his death to be imminent. Based on his conversation with Jesus in John 21 he knew the how, not just the when. Scholars conclude that the letter of I Peter was written sometime in the early 60’s. II Peter was written before Nero’s death in AD 68, which puts this letter written in AD 67 since Peter’s death was at the hand of Emperor Nero.

As we begin our study in II Peter my intent today is to just give an overview of the letter. In our time this morning I want us to consider three primary points.

The dispute about the letter  
 The direction of the letter  
 The desire from the letter

### I. THE DISPUTE ABOUT THE LETTER

There are two main disputes about the letter. The first dispute, believe it or not, centers on the author of the letter. Some aren’t certain Peter wrote the letter even though that’s how it begins.

#### A. The Dispute About Its Author

The very opening of the letter begins with “Simon

Peter”. Based on the opening we assume that he is the author, but there has been a dispute since as early as the second century. As a matter of fact, the authorship of this letter has been more hotly contested than any other book of the New Testament, even though we see right away the claims of the letter to be written by Peter. Critics indicate that this letter has less external and historical evidence for its genuineness because it is so short, it has little new information, and is not addressed to any specific person or church. Another reason some dispute the letter is that it was not widely circulated among the churches.

If there is one thing that strengthens the validity of Peter’s authorship and its authenticity is in fact in the opening name that is used. The Greek text actually reads “Simeon Peter”, a name used only one other time in Acts 15:14. It’s unlikely that someone forging his name would use a little-known name to identify himself as the author. In spite of that critics still claim the letter was forged.

Identity theft is a concern today and letter forgeries were not uncommon in those days, someone writing a letter using someone else’s identity. That happened to Paul and was part of the reason he wrote to the believers in Thessalonica.

#### II Thessalonians 2:2

Letters had arrived at the church bearing Paul’s name saying that the Day of the Lord had already come and they had missed the boat. So he wrote to reassure them that the Day of the Lord was still yet future and to make certain they knew the other letters had been forged.

Scholars who support the authorship of Peter indicate that forgers would write in a way that discredited something the person wrote previously. If II Peter was the work of a forger it shows no evidence in the letter of trying to attack the credibility of Peter to discredit his reputation and teaching in order to make their own teaching more

credible. Forgers also attempted to copy the style of the previous letter to make their letter appears genuine, yet a careful study shows significant differences in literary style between I and II Peter.

Forgeries were nothing new and some scholars believe that is the case here because of the absence of certain components that would substantiate his authorship and because of the lack of solid support in church history by the early church fathers.

But there is strong internal evidence in the body of the letter to suggest that Peter was the author. Some of the internal evidence supporting the credibility of Peter being the author is seen in several passages.

1:13-14 mentions the prediction of Christ about how the author would die. A reference to the discussion between Jesus and Peter in John 21:18. Since the gospel of John was written after II Peter a forger wouldn’t have known that detail.

In 1:16-18 the author speaks of being an eyewitness to the transfiguration found in Matthew 17:1.

In 3:1 the author refers to an earlier letter he had written to these believers.

In 3:15 the author refers to Paul as being a beloved brother, an indication that they were colleagues.

Internal evidence supports Peter as the author.

Critics of Peter’s authorship also refer to the dissimilarity in style, vocabulary and doctrine between I Peter and II Peter. The first epistle has a very polished grammatical structure to it while II Peter is constructed of a coarser Greek grammar that has difficult sentence structures. These critics also suggest that a simple Galilean fisherman would not have had such an understanding of Greek culture as is seen in the letter.

We know that Silas assisted Peter in writing the first letter and his style is evident as its scribe. Some scholars suggest that Mark may have helped Peter write this letter. He is named in the conclusion of I Peter and Mark used Peter as a source in writing his gospel. But the absence of his name in the closing

remarks of this letter suggests that he was not its scribe leaving scholars to conclude that Peter wrote this letter himself.

Another suggestion by critics about the dispute of the authorship is that the strong doctrine so evident in I Peter is absent in II Peter. There are more generalities and omissions in doctrine in II Peter.

While there is not definitive support from the early church fathers, we need look no further than them to lend credibility to Peter's authorship. The early church fathers never considered the book of II Peter to be false, although Eusebius had some questions. Origen was a literary critic who would not have so easily been duped into accepting the letter if it was a forgery. He also referred numerous times to II Peter as Scripture in his writings.

Clement of Alexandria who was Origen's teacher included II Peter in his commentary on the general epistles.

The Council of Laodicea accepted it in AD 372 as part of the New Testament canon as did the 2<sup>nd</sup> Council of Carthage in AD 397. Jerome included it in the Latin Vulgate he translated in AD 404.

There is credible internal and external evidence supporting Peter as the author even though there are those, even today, who dispute his authorship.

The second dispute regarding the letter has to do with its authenticity.

## B. The Dispute About Its Authenticity

The dispute centers on the similarity of content to the book of Jude. Critics suggest that there is a dependency on the literary style and content of Jude suggesting that II Peter was written after Jude, which was written after Peter's death. Critics say that the letter borrows from some of the content of

Jude. However, the internal evidence of the letter suggests that II Peter came first. In II Peter the author refers to false teachers in the future tense while Jude refers to them in the present tense, meaning that they had appeared.

Other critics dispute the authenticity of the letter because it has elements of Gnosticism which didn't surface until the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. However, the basic beliefs of Gnosticism began in the 1<sup>st</sup> century and morphed over time in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century into what became known as Gnosticism.

In spite of the criticism about the author and its authority there is no credible evidence to suggest that the author or its authenticity should be challenged. The rightful author of this letter is Peter.

Higher criticism is essentially an attack on the credibility of all Scripture. If one book is false the credibility of the rest of the Bible would also be questioned as well. We will see from 1:20-21 that the authors of Scripture were moved by the Holy Spirit to write. II Timothy 3:16 reminds us that all Scripture is inspired by God.

While there are disputes about this letter, they are not credible and do nothing to undermine the author as Peter, the authenticity of the letter, or the content of its message.

Next, let's consider the direction of the letter.

## II. THE DIRECTION OF THE LETTER

If there is an anchor point in the letter that holds it all together, a passage we come back to that is the strength that binds it all, a thesis statement that helps guide us through the letter it is 1:3-4. This is a great passage to memorize.

Let's recite this passage together and since I learned it in the KJV we'll recite it from that translation.

“According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue; by which are given unto us exceedingly great and precious promises, that by these ye may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is the world through lust.”

Here’s how the Message puts it:

“Everything that goes into a life of pleasing God has been miraculously given to us by getting to know, personally and intimately, the One who invited us to God. The best invitation we ever received! We were also given absolutely terrific promises to pass on to you—your tickets to participation in the life of God after you turned your back on a world corrupted by lust.”

J B Phillips paraphrases it this way: “He has by His own action given us everything that is necessary for living the truly good life, in allowing us to know the one who has called us to Him, through His own glorious goodness. It is through Him that God's greatest and most precious promises have become available to us men, making it possible for you to escape the inevitable disintegration that lust produces in the world and to share in God's essential nature.”

We’ll get into this passage in more detail in a few weeks but essentially Peter is saying that everything we need to live a godly life, God has made available to us through our knowledge of Him. He has given us great promises that help in overcoming the lusts of the world. Just as an airport has a central hub from which flights go to other cities and return as its base of operations, so II Peter 1:3-4 is the hub for the rest of the letter.

It will be the go to verse to encourage godly living.  
It will be the go to verse when combating false teachers.

It will be the go to verse when preparing for the

future of Christ’s return.

If 1:3-4 is the theme or thesis statement, then the goal or aim of the letter is found in 3:18: “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever! Amen.”

The word “know” or “knowledge” appears 16 times in this short letter. Do you think then that knowledge of God is important? Warren Wiersbe says “the word doesn’t mean a mere intellectual understanding of the truth. Instead it means a living participation in the truth in the sense that our Lord used it in John 17:3”: “Now this is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.”

It’s not just head knowledge, it’s heart knowledge.

As we study through this letter we will come to understand what it is Peter wants us to know and why knowledge of God is so important.

The first chapter is about knowing God in order to faithfully grow as a Christian. Without such spiritual growth in our lives then chapter two will be a challenge for the Christian who is not maturing.

Chapter two is about knowing God in order to identify and refute false teachers.

In I Peter the focus was on Christians being able to live godly lives in the middle of persecution, suffering that came from outside the church. In II Peter the author reveals that the concern for believers comes from inside the church in the form of false teachers.

Someone estimated that there are about 10,000 cults in the world today. I have a couple of books in my library on cults and what they believe. I’m sure it’s not an exhaustive work, because it’s like the telephone book, there are always changes. Lots of cults means lots of error. In chapter two we will see the similarities with the book of Jude which instructs us to contend for the faith against false

teachers. Peter will give us a glimpse into the window of what they were teaching so that we know what to avoid. This chapter will help us see just how important it is for us to know God and His Word in order to identify false teachers.

I heard someone say that to teach a bank teller how to identify counterfeit money, they teach them by handling real money. When you get to know what real money looks like, you are able to identify a forgery.

If we know God and His truth by studying His Word, we can identify and defend against false teaching.

Chapter three then teaches us to delight in knowing God's Word so that we can better understand the promises related to the second coming of Christ. It helps us to be prepared for the future.

Through our study I hope you will come to understand how important it is to know God and why we should know Him. It's my prayer that we take such a desire to heart and begin a more earnest effort at knowing Him, not just to increase our knowledge of Him, but come to understand all that He has done for us, the promises that are ours, the help that is available now for godly living, and the praise that is due to Him.

Bruce Barton writes that this letter was "Written to strengthen the church to resist the internal challenges to the faith, this brief letter warns of false teachers who deny Christ and scoffers who mock His return. Believers are to be aware and to keep their focus on Christ."

If the theme is 1:3-4 and the goal is 3:18, the challenge is found in 3:11-13, the same as we saw in I Peter 1:15-16.

"Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will

bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with His promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness."

Godly living now in anticipation of the future. Peter moves from the first letter speaking about the comfort we gain in persecution that God gives us to caution in persuasion in the second letter from false teachers and the knowledge of God that will help identify them as we anticipate the return of His Son. Just as knowledge is a safeguard from apostasy it is also a safeguard for what we look forward to in the future at Jesus' return.

We will see the relevancy of the letter for us today as we consider the many false teachers that exist not just outside the church, but especially and unfortunately those inside the church.

John MacArthur writes "The rapid advancement of mass media, coupled with the church's lack of discernment, has allowed doctrinal error to spread like wildfire. False teachers propagate their heresies via television, radio, the internet, books, magazines and seminars – doing whatever they can for their own self-promotion. In the process their deceit lures multitudes to exchange the truth for lies."

They tell you just enough of the truth to make you believe everything they are saying is true.

While they aren't in the church, the Hare Krishna's have it down. They approach you by asking if you believe in God and prayer, things that we would say yes to. They lure you in, set the hook, and then reel you in. False teachers in the church do the same.

That's the approach Satan used with Eve in the Garden of Eden and then used on Jesus to try and get Him to forfeit the cross. He uses false teachers in the church to lure you from the truth by making

you think you are hearing the truth by making it sound good.

I hope you take seriously the truth of God in His Word.

For example, when you begin to deny the truth of Genesis 1 and 2 you are on your way to denying things like the virgin birth or that marriage is defined by God as being between a man and a woman or the reality of sin or the necessity of a redeemer who would pay for that sin.

The call of II Peter isn't anything different than what made the early church so committed to their faith and to each other in the body. Acts 2:42 says that they were devoted to the study of God's Word.

Acts 17:11 says that the Bereans were more noble than the Thessalonians because they didn't just accept at face value what Paul was teaching them, they went and studied it for themselves to make certain that what he was teaching was accurate.

Paul challenged Timothy in II Timothy 2:15 to correctly handle God's Word. It's our challenge also.

We can't expect to contend for the faith or identify false teaching if we don't get to know this Book and the author of this Book. The conclusion of the matter is so important – "Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

We can't expect to know God's expectations for godly living if we don't know Him or His Word well.

I am still in the process of getting to know my wife well. Gary Chapman's book *The Five Love Languages* tremendously. At the end of the book is a survey to fill out. It helped me understand what makes Robyn tick; although as a woman it's her prerogative to change every 5 or 6 minutes. What she enjoys is spending time together and having

things done for her. I have saved a lot of time and money and frustration not having to worry about buying her gifts because that doesn't float her boat. It takes time and effort to know her and in the long run that effort pays off in great ways.

I need to, we need to get to know God intimately through His Word. That is the direction of the letter.

There's just one more point to mention about the letter. It's about desire.

### III. THE DESIRE FROM THE LETTER

We have already taken some time to consider our desire to know God and His Word. It's found in chapter 3. While much of the chapter is doom and gloom destruction and judgment, laced throughout are some wonderful promises.

There is the promise of His patience in 3:9 for those who have yet to come to repentance and trust Christ for salvation. God's desire is for you to be saved, for all to be saved. Our desire is for others – family, friends, strangers – to be saved as well. Don't be satisfied that you're saved. God was patient with you and me. We need to patiently and persistently pray for others to be saved. That should be our desire as well.

There is the promise of looking forward to a new heaven and new earth found in 3:13. The true beauty of this earth was destroyed when sin entered the picture in Genesis 3. God has planned a new heaven and earth. Our desire is to look forward to what God is preparing.

We are given a challenge in 3:14 to live godly now while we wait for that new heaven and earth. That new place of residence is something we are to desire.

I hope you are looking forward to our study for the purpose of knowing God better with the anticipation of growing in your faith. It's a great last letter.