



1 Peter - An introduction

Author and Title

Peter was the first apostle named in the list of the original twelve and was one of the first to be chosen to serve Jesus. He was clearly a man of great duty and integrity; and was part of Jesus' inner core of disciples along with James and John. This group seemed to attend most of the most significant occasions, such as the Transfiguration of Christ. However, there is no hint of any supremacy among the apostles, indeed Christ forbade it, although it could be claimed that Peter was first among equals in terms of his total devotion to his duty. At times he was overzealous and was reprimanded for it. He was the apostle who denied even knowing his Lord, for which he must have suffered greatly, but later he was clearly forgiven so graciously by Christ. He went on to have an outstanding ministry of service to Christ and to the establishment of the church, but he did so in all humility and with honour. There is no substance to the claim by some that he was Christ's only emissary on earth that gave rise to the papal office. He lived to serve his Lord in equality with other elders and saints, dying as a martyr in that very act of service.

That this letter was written by the apostle Peter is explicitly affirmed by its opening verse and by the author's claim to be: <<***a witness of Christ's sufferings***>> (1 Peter 5:1). The title of the letter, The First Epistle of Peter, functions as early external evidence for the view that the letter was written by Peter. Indeed, in the early church there was no dispute over the authenticity of the epistle, for it was regularly ascribed to Peter by the early church fathers.

Some recent scholars maintain that the letter is falsely ascribed to Peter. Thus some have argued that:

1. The cultivated Greek of the letter could not have been written by a Galilæan fisherman like Peter.
2. The theology is too much like Paul's to be ascribed to Peter.
3. The OT citations come from the Greek OT (Septuagint), but the genuine Peter would have cited the Hebrew OT.

4. The background of the letter reflects the reign of the Roman emperors Domitian (AD 81-96), or Trajan (AD 98-117), both of whom reigned after Peter's death.
5. The genuine Peter would have referred more to the historical Jesus.

None of these objections are compelling, and there are persuasive reasons for continuing to support Petrine authorship:

1. Peter was a middle-class fisherman who very likely knew Greek from his youth. There is significant evidence that Greek was spoken quite commonly in Galilee. Furthermore, Peter may have used a secretary, namely Silas, to assist him in composing the letter.
2. Although the common elements in the theology of Peter and Paul should not be exaggerated, for there are distinctive themes in Peter, e.g. the particular emphasis on suffering, it should not be surprising that Peter and Paul shared the same theology.
3. It is hardly unexpected that Peter would cite the Greek OT in writing to Greek readers.
4. There is no clear evidence that the letter was written under the reign of Domitian or Trajan.
5. The reader must be careful of saying what an author must do, i.e. although one cannot demand that Peter refer to the historical Jesus in a short letter written for a specific purpose, there is significant evidence that Peter alludes to some of the sayings of Jesus, e.g. Luke 12:35 in 1 Peter 1:13, Matthew 5:16 in 1 Peter 2:12, and Matthew 5:10 in 1 Peter 3:14.
6. Finally, there is no historical evidence in early church history that pseudonymous books, especially letters, were accepted as authoritative and inspired. Indeed, writing in someone else's name was considered deceptive: *<<not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come>>* (2 Thessalonians 2:2), and: *<<I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write>>* (2 Thessalonians 3:17). On balance, there are compelling reasons to conclude that the apostle Peter is in fact the author of 1 Peter.

Date

The date of 1 Peter is linked with the issue of authorship. Those who reject Peter as the author typically date the letter in the reign of Domitian (AD 81-96), or Trajan (AD 98-117). Since there are good grounds for holding to Petrine authorship, the letter probably should be dated during the reign of Nero (AD 54-68). The reference to Babylon in 1 Peter 5:13 is almost certainly a reference to Rome, leading one to conclude that Peter wrote the letter from Rome. He probably wrote before the Neronian persecution in Rome, and thus the date of composition is likely AD62-63.

Theme

Those who persevere in faith while suffering persecution should be full of hope, for they will certainly enjoy end-time salvation, since they are already enjoying God's saving promises here and now through the death and resurrection of Christ.

Purpose of 1 Peter

Peter encourages his readers to endure suffering and persecution, refer specifically to 1 Peter 1:6-7, 2:18-20, 3:9, 3:13-17, 4:1-4, 4:12-19, and 5:9, by giving themselves entirely to God (1 Peter 4:19). They are to remain faithful in times of distress, knowing that God will vindicate them and that they will certainly enjoy the salvation that the Lord has promised. The death and resurrection of Christ stand as the paradigm for the lives of believers. Just as Christ suffered and then entered into glory, so too his followers will suffer before being exalted.

The letter is addressed to Christians dispersed in 'Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia' (1 Peter 1:1), an area north and west of the Taurus Mountains in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey; see the map. These provinces were ethnically and at times linguistically diverse, yet all these territories had been impacted by Greco-Roman culture and were firmly under Roman control from the mid 1st Century BC. The order in which the areas are listed probably designates the order in which the courier, probably Silas, see 1 Peter 5:12, would carry the letter to its intended readership.



The map shows all the places named by Peter, all of which are in Turkey.

Most scholars are convinced that the recipients of 1 Peter were a mixture of Jewish and Gentile Christians. The reference to their former ignorance (1 Peter 1:14), and: <<**from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers**>> (1 Peter 1:18), suggests a pagan past that would not fit with Jewish readers. Further, the former lifestyle of the readers (1 Peter 4:3-4) fits with Gentiles rather than Jews. However, some of the language used clearly indicates

an understanding of Israel's heritage, so familiar to Jews, proselytes and God-fearers, so undoubtedly there were also some Jewish Christians in these churches, for Jewish residents of Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia were present at Pentecost and had heard the Gospel at that early date: <<*Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judæa and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia*>> (Acts 2:9). Although the recipients may have been literally exiles (1 Peter 1:1, 1:17, and 2:11), it is more likely that Peter speaks figuratively here: they are spiritual exiles awaiting their heavenly inheritance.

In the past, many scholars detected an empire-wide persecution of Christians in 1 Peter, whether under Nero (AD 54-68), Domitian (AD 81-96), or Trajan (AD 98-117), and even used this argument to deny that Peter wrote the letter by specifically placing 1 Peter in the reign of either Domitian or Trajan. However, the evidence is lacking in the reign of all these emperors for an official government policy against Christians. Instead, there were spasmodic and general outbursts against Christians during the 1st Century. Nero's persecution of Christians after the great fire in Rome (AD 64) did not launch official empire-wide persecution of all Christians; nor does 1 Peter reflect an official policy against Christians. Also, an empire-wide decree against Christians is not necessitated by Peter's writing about the need to respond when asked about one's faith (1 Peter 3:15), the charges brought against Christians (1 Peter 4:14-16), or the reference to believers suffering worldwide (1 Peter 5:9). The questions and charges brought against Christians that Peter mentions in 1 Peter 3:15 and 4:14-16 were typical of the everyday questions believers would encounter because of their faith. In some instances, Roman authorities punished Christians, but even in these cases it was a local and restricted response. The reference to believers suffering throughout the world (1 Peter 5:9) does not signal that the Roman Empire had passed a decree against the Christian faith. This verse simply reveals that the Christian faith was under threat in the entire Greco-Roman world. Indeed, 1 Peter says nothing about Christians suffering physically for their faith. The focus is on verbal abuse and discrimination they receive because of their Christian commitment (1 Peter 4:3-4). Of course, verbal abuse easily leads to physical mistreatment, and it is possible that some of the believers to whom Peter wrote were suffering physical abuse for their faith as well (1 Peter 2:18-20).

Summary of Salvation History

Christians are to endure suffering for the sake of Christ, looking back on Christ's sufferings and forward to the consummation of salvation at his Second Coming.

Writing Style

First Peter follows the usual contours of the NT epistles. Along with the standard ingredients of salutation; thanksgiving; body-parænesis or moral exhortations; closing; there is a pattern of back-and-forth movement between theological assertions and either practical application or lyric celebration. The book moves in a fluid manner between two poles: the riches that believers have in Christ and the duties they need to shoulder, within the implied situation of their living in a hostile surrounding culture.

First Peter is exuberant in tone and exalted in language. Virtually every paragraph contains vivid imagery and a skilful use of figurative language. The tone of the

book is urgent and intense, as signalled by the presence of more than 30 imperative verbs, an average of one command in every three verses. The content and style are thus elevated and elevating.

Key Themes

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Verses</u>
1. Those who suffer as Christians will be exalted.	1:6-9; 2:18-25; 3:13-22; 4:12-19.
2. The church of Jesus Christ is the new temple, the new Israel, the new people of God.	1:1-2; 2:4-10.
3. Believers should set their hope on their end-time inheritance.	1:3-9, 13-16.
4. Christ died as a substitute for sinners and his death is the foundation for their new life.	1:17-21; 2:24; 3:13-22.
5. Christ's suffering is an example to his disciples.	2:21-23.
6. At his resurrection, Christ triumphed over his enemies.	3:18-22.
7. Christians should live righteously in their homes and in society.	2:11-3:7.
8. New life in Christ is the basis for a life of love and holiness.	1:3; 1:13-2:3.

The Setting of 1 Peter

Peter, probably writing from Rome, which he refers to as Babylon in 1 Peter 5:13, around AD62-63, addressed his first epistle to believers in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

These names all referred to Roman provinces in Asia Minor, north and west of the Taurus Mountains.

Outline

- I. Opening Exhortation (1:1-2)
- II. Called to Salvation as Exiles (1:3-2:12)
 - a. Praise to God for a Living Hope (1:3-12)
 - b. Be Holy (1:13-2:3)
 - c. The Living Stone and a Chosen People (2:4-12)
- III. Living as Aliens to Bring Glory to God in a Hostile World (2:13-4:11)
 - a. Testifying to the gospel in the social order (2:13-3:7)
 - i. Submission to Rulers and Masters (2:13-25)
 - ii. Wives and Husbands (3:1-7)
 - b. Responding to suffering in a godly way (3:8-4:11)
 - i. Suffering for Doing Good (3:8-22)
 - ii. Living for God (4:1-11)
- IV. Persevering in Suffering (4:12-5:11)
 - a. Suffering for Being a Christian (4:12-19)
 - b. To Elders and Young Men (5:1-11)
- V. Final greetings (5:12-14)