

THE EPISTLE OF 1 PETER

“Let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.” 1 Peter 4:19

AUTHOR: This is the first of two letters that bear the name of the author, Peter the Apostle

- † Peter was the son of Jonas (Mt. 16:17; Jn. 1:42), was originally named Simeon (Mk. 1:16, Jn. 1:40), and was a fisherman who lived in Bethsaida and Capernaum. His brother Andrew introduced him to Jesus (John 1:40).
- † Peter was married and his wife may have accompanied him during his ministry (Mark 1:29-31; 1 Cor. 9:5).
- † Jesus renamed him Peter / Cephas which means “rock” or “stone” (Jn 1:42; Mt. 16:18). Peter was the leader among the apostles and in the early church, including preaching on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2).
- † According to tradition, Peter was forced to watch his wife be crucified, but encouraged her with the words, “Remember the Lord.” He too was crucified, but pled to be crucified upside down because he said that he was not worthy to die the death of his Lord. He was granted this final request and died in 67-68AD.
- † Internal Evidence: the author was a “witness of the sufferings of Christ” (2:23, 5:1; Mt. 26:58-69) and was writing from “Babylon” (Rome) which is consistent with early church testimony of Peter’s ministry (5:13).
- † External Evidence: 2 Peter claims to be the second letter written by Peter.¹ Aside from this, numerous other sources from the early church quote from 1 Peter and claim the Apostle was the author.²
- † The phrase “by Silvanus” (5:12) refers to Silvanus being the one whom Peter personally commissioned to carry the letter, not that he was the secretary / amanuensis who actually penned the letter.

AUDIENCE: congregations of Jew and Gentile Christians who faced increasing social and physical persecution

- † 1 Peter is a “general epistle” written not to one particular congregation (ie. Ephesians, Galatians, etc), but to a group of congregations scattered throughout Asia Minor (modern day Turkey).
- † Since it had been over 30 years since Pentecost, the churches would have been multi-ethnic congregations.
- † Gentiles are addressed (1:18, 2:10, 4:3-4) and it can safely be assumed that Jews lived among these cities since they were present at Pentecost (Acts 2:9). Peter applies Jewish terms to these New Covenant churches.

DATE: a date of 62-64AD is most probable.

- † Persecution the recipients were facing was very likely not an official persecution by the government throughout the entire Roman empire like the ones under Domitian (95AD) or Trajan (112AD).
- † Peter died at the hands of Nero during the localized persecution of Christians in Rome (64-68AD). Some suggest that his unqualified positive comments about the government (2:13-17) require a date prior to 64AD.³

PURPOSE: To encourage believers to grow in their trust and obedience to God in the midst of their suffering.

- † In the LORD’s kindness, this letter arrived before the heaviest waves of persecution as a way to ground them more deeply in the person of Christ and the unshakable hope of heaven.

¹ I take 2 Peter to be written by Peter, but even if not, it is a very early testimony of an even earlier letter by Peter.

² 1 Peter is quoted in *Epistle to the Philippians* by Polycarp (died, 155 AD), writings of Papias (died, 130AD), *Against Heresies* by Irenaeus (182-88AD), and in the historical accounts of Eusebius (325 AD).

³ I find this reasoning unpersuasive as Peter and Paul (Romans 13:1-7) speak without bias under the inspiration of the Spirit.

KEY TERMS / IDEAS: These terms are repeated in 1 Peter and are helpful to understanding the book.

1. “Jesus (x9) / Christ (x22)” is the Savior of sinners and also the example for God’s people to emulate by grace
2. “suffer” (x17) Christians are promised that persecution, trials, and temptations will line the way to heaven
3. “obey / obedience” (x7) worship is most basically keeping God’s commands, which is more difficult during trials
4. “evil” (x8) destructive immorality that is harmful to people and opposed to God’s character and rule
5. “grace” (x8) an unmerited gift of God by which He gives salvation and strength to fight against sin and struggles
6. “love” (x9) an affectionate delight for God and others produced in the heart of believers through regeneration
7. “living” (x12) in stark contrast to the perishing world, God gives new life to His people by uniting them with Jesus
8. “passions” (x4) sensual affections for sinful pleasures that characterizes those who do not know Jesus
9. “called” (x7) the act of God to draw sinners to Himself through the power of the Holy Spirit
10. “holy” (x9) distinctly set apart from all sin and evil; God is the holy one who makes His people like Himself
11. “judge” (x5) God is the final judge who executed justice at the cross and will judge the wicked on the last day
12. “heaven” (x3) Peter constantly calls the suffering saints to look toward their coming heavenly home
13. “hope” (x5) in the face of trial Christians do not despair because they know God has and will act for their good
14. “glory” (x11) weighty and beautiful radiance of God that His people will share when He returns for us
15. “Jesus’ Return” is the hope of God’s people and is highlighted throughout 1 Peter (1:5, 1:7, 1:13, 2:12, 4:7, 4:13, 5:1, 5:4)

AN OUTLINE OF 1 PETER

1:1-2:10 – Chosen for New Birth

1:1-12 – Joy in our Living Hope

1:1-2 – Elect Exiles

1:3-5 – Future Inheritance

1:6-9 – Present Joy

1:10-12 – Past Revelation

1:13-2:10 – Grace to Live in Holiness

1:13-16 – The Preparation for Holiness

1:17-21 – The Price of Holiness

1:22-2:3 – The Purification in Holiness

2:4-10 – The Priesthood of Holiness

2:11-3:22 – Called to New Behavior

2:11-3:7 – Glorifying God in Our Conduct

2:11-12 – Christian Conduct as Witnesses

2:13-17 – Christian Conduct as Citizens

2:18-25 – Christian Conduct as Slaves

3:1-7 – Christian Conduct as Spouses

3:8-22 – Suffering for Righteousness Sake

3:8-12 – Bless Others while Suffering

3:13-17 – Keep a Clear Conscience in Suffering

3:18-22 – Christ Suffered for Sins

4:1-5:14 – Kept for Coming Glory

4:1-19 – Endure Suffering with the End in View

4:1-6 – Suffer as Christ Suffered

4:7-11 – Serve as Stewards of Grace

4:12-19 – Share in Christ’s Sufferings

5:1-14 – Entrust Yourself to God’s Care

5:1-4 – Elders Shepherd as Examples

5:5-11 – Humbly Submit to God’s Care

5:12-14 – Stand Firm In God’s Grace