

THE BOOK OF 1 PETER

“The Epistle of Living Hope”

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A. Writer: Peter

1. The name Peter (Πέτρος) means large rock or stone. He is mentioned more than any other apostle. His name is used 210 times in the New Testament. Peter is listed first among the apostles (Matt. 10:2-4; Mk. 3:16-19; Lk. 6:14-16; Acts 1:13) and was the primary leader of the church (Acts 2:14-41; 8:14-25).
2. Peter was a native of Bethsaida, a village on the Sea of Galilee (Jn. 1:44). Because of his geographical location, he was a fisherman.
3. Peter moved to Capernaum when he married and lived with his in-laws (Matt. 8:5-14).

B. Recipients: Jewish and Gentile Christians spread throughout Asia Minor

1. Jewish audience: Peter makes reference to the Old Testament scriptures throughout the book (1 Pet. 1:10-12, 24-25; 2:6-8, 9, 22; 3:10-12, 14; 4:18; 5:5). Each of the occurrences suggests a Jewish audience.
2. Gentile audience: Peter also uses what are called the “Gentile phrases” (1:14, 2:9-10, 4:3).
3. While scholars are divided on the issue, it is best to combine both views and to not be dogmatic in either direction.

II. DATE, PLACE OF WRITING, AND DESTINATION

A. Date: 64 AD (summer) – Before the persecutions became a major issue for Christians

1. 64 AD – Nonviolent persecution of believers begins. Persecutions were sporadic and not instigated by the government.
2. 65-66 AD – Persecutions begin to intensify against Christians and some become violent.
3. 67 AD – Peter is martyred under Emperor Nero.
4. 68-70 AD – Persecution of Christians is full blown. Emperor Nero orders Rome to be burned in 70 AD and then blames Christians for starting the fire.

B. Place of Writing: Three possible locations (1 Pet. 5:13)

1. Babylon in Egypt – Since Babylon was a very small town and there is no record that Peter was ever in this region, it is very unlikely that Peter wrote the letter from this location.
2. Babylon on the Euphrates – It's doubtful this is the location of the writing because this location was completely deserted by the New Testament era.
3. Babylon – Rome was nicknamed “Babylon” at the time of the writing and Babylon is also the symbolic name for Rome in Revelation (Rev. 17:3-5, 9). Add to this that church tradition teaches that Peter was beheaded in Rome and this becomes the best of the three choices.

C. Destination of the Epistle: The Churches of Asia Minor (see map)

1. Pontus – Located in northern Asia Minor, it is mentioned three times in the New Testament (Acts 2:9, 18:2; 1 Pet. 1:1). The local population was made up of Jewish residents. The whole region came under the control of Nero and belonged to the Roman government. The city was conquered by the Turks in 1461 AD and is still under their control.
2. Galatia – Deriving its name from the Gallic or Celtic tribes, the people were known for being easily fooled and unable to make clear decisions (Gal. 3:1-5). Galatia is located north of Cappadocia and was considered the central region of the peninsula of Asia Minor.
3. Cappadocia – The largest province in ancient Asia Minor, Cappadocia is an elevated table-land intersected by mountains. Though the land was deficient of wood, it was particularly famous for grazing. Cappadocia is mentioned two times in the New Testament (Acts 2:3; 1 Pet. 1:1).
4. Asia – A Roman Province which embraced the western parts of Asia Minor, its capital city was Ephesus (Acts 2:9; 6:9; 16:6; 19:10, 22; 20:4, 16, 18). Asia contained the seven churches of the Apocalypse (Rev. 1:11). The region was home to wealthy officials that were friends of the Apostle Paul (Acts 19:31). The officials were elected annually to oversee games and religious festivals.
5. Bithynia – Pliny, a Roman proconsul, ruled the city and was perplexed about how to deal with the Christian population. In AD 107, Pliny wrote the Emperor Trajan

for instructions concerning Christianity. Bithynia was a province of Asia Minor and under Roman control.

III. AUTHORSHIP AND BEARER OF THE LETTER

A. Authorship – Support for Petrine authorship

1. Author – identified as “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:1)
2. Book of Acts – A number of phrases in 1 Peter match those in the book of Acts. Compare Acts 2:23 and 1 Peter 1:20 on the foreordination of Christ’s death as well as Acts 10:42 and 1 Peter 4:5 on the judgment of the “living and the dead.” For a further similarity, note the distinctive use of the Greek word *xylon* (literally “wood”) for the cross in Acts 5:30; 10:39 and 1 Peter 2:24.
3. Church Fathers – Eusebus (church historian), Polycarp, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria all acknowledge Peter as the author of the letter.

B. Bearer of the letter

1. The bearer of the letter is “Silas” (Latin, “Silvanus”) as noted in 1 Peter 5:12.
2. Missions with Paul – Silas carried news of the Jerusalem conference to the believers in Antioch (Acts 15:22). He accompanied Paul on a missionary trip to Asia Minor (Acts 15:40-41). He was imprisoned with Paul for two years at Philippi (Acts 16:19-24).
3. Missions with Peter – In the later years, Silas teamed with Peter on missions in Pontus and Cappadocia. He also served as an amanuensis (scribe) for Peter in writing the epistles.

IV. OCCASION, PURPOSE, AND STYLE OF LETTER

A. Occasion for writing – Believers were beginning to experience persecution and minor problems in the church.

1. These persecutions took various forms:
 - a. Various trials/tests (1:6) – The Greek word for “trials” (πειρασμός) means to put to a test. When God is the agent, it is for the purpose of proving someone and never for the purpose of causing someone to fall.
 - b. Charges of disloyalty to the state (2:13-17)
 - c. Malicious speech (3:13-17)
 - d. Insults, slander, and accusations (4:12-19)

2. Reason for these attacks (1 Peter 4:4) – These believers were being obedient to the faith and standing fast against the contemporary culture.
3. Elders – Greed may have been starting to make inroads into the church. Peter wrote to straighten the problem out (5:2-3).

B. Purpose in writing

1. To explain the relationship of trials to God's purpose in salvation (1:1-12)
2. To provoke the readers to live lives of holiness, love growth, and testimony (1:13-2:12)
3. To call for submission of believers to civil authorities (2:13-17), of servants to masters (2:18-25), and of wives to husbands (3:1-8)
4. To discuss the proper attitude of believers in suffering (3:19-4:19)
5. To provide guidelines to the elders for proper performance of their ministries (5:1-4) and to warn the elders against the tactics of Satan (5:8-11)
6. To send personal greetings to the churches in Asia Minor (5:12-14)

C. Style of writing

1. "Suffering" – The central motif of the letter, "suffering" is used 16 times. Of the 16 passages devoted to suffering, the suffering of Christ is used 6 times (1:11; 2:23; 3:18; 4:1, 13; 5:1)
2. Letter of exhortation – Peter's literary style reveals a definite preference for the imperative. Peter makes 34 commands to his readers throughout the letter.
3. Doctrine of Christ – His incarnation (1:20), His sinless life (1:19; 2:22), His suffering and death (2:24), His resurrection (3:21-22), His ascension (3:22), His presence at the right hand of God (3:22), His second coming (1:7, 13; 4:13; 5:1, 4)

OUTLINE OF 1 PETER

SALUTATION (1:1-2)

I. LIFE OF SALVATION (1:3-12)

- A. Plan of salvation (1:3-5)
- B. Purpose of trials (1:6-9)
- C. Prophecy of Christ (1:10-12)

II. LIFE OF SANCTIFICATION (1:13-2:10)

- A. Life of hope (1:13)
- B. Life of holiness (1:14-16)
- C. Life of godly fear (1:17-21)
- D. Life of love (1:22-25)
- E. Life of growth (2:1-10)
 - 1. Individual growth (2:1-3)
 - 2. Corporate growth (2:4-12)

III. LIFE OF SUBMISSION (2:13-3:12)

- A. Obligations of citizens to the state (2:13-17)
- B. Obligations of slaves to masters (2:18-25)
- C. Obligations of wives to husbands (3:1-6)
- D. Obligations of husbands to wives (3:7)
- E. Obligations of believers to one another (3:8-12)

IV. LIFE OF SUFFERING (3:13-4:19)

- A. Experience of suffering for righteousness (3:13-17)
- B. Example of Christ as suffering for righteousness (3:18-22)
- C. Equipment for suffering as Christians (4:1-11)
- D. Exhortation to steadfastness in suffering (4:12-19)

V. LIFE OF SERVICE (5:1-9)

- A. Plea to the shepherds of the church (5:1-4)
- B. Plea to the soldiers of the church (5:5-9)

CONCLUSION (5:10-14)

MAP OF ASIA MINOR THE ROMAN EMPIRE

