

Study 1: Introduction to 1st Peter

Introduction

1st Peter is a practical book that gives us much instruction on the practical application of our faith in the challenges of the real world. The underlying theme is christian living in the face of suffering and hostility. Christ and His suffering permeates the whole letter, and His overcoming through the resurrection permeates the whole letter.

The general nature of the letter does not deal with specific issues, but it is full of encouragement in the face of the trials and suffering.

Body of the Study

The Recipients of the Letter

The Author of the Letter

Date and Occasion of the Letter

The style of the letter

Outline of the letter

Selected Bibliography

Key points – Introduction & Conclusion

Homework and preparation for next week:

Read the whole book in a single sitting, and a few days later read chapter 1 again.

Read the notes as a review of the study

Review the introduction and conclusion, (page 6 of the notes) and find the key words & thoughts. Put these together into a “story” to find the key things that Peter wants to tell us about the letter.

Count how many times Peter uses the term “suffering” (or it’s derivatives) in the letter. What things is he telling them? - What is the key message?

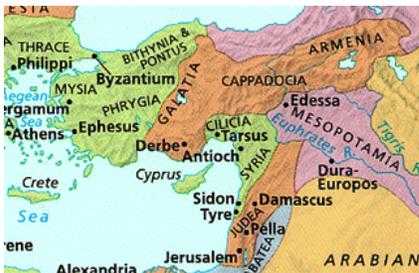
Notes for study 1: Introduction to 1st Peter

Like James, 1st & 2nd Peter are “general epistles” in the New Testament, because they are not written to a specific person (as were Timothy, Titus, and Philemon), or a specific church (Romans, Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians), or a specific group of churches (Galatians).

Acceptance of 1st Peter as a part of the New Testament Canon is almost without dispute, although there is much dispute about 2nd Peter. Also like James, 1st Peter is a very practical book, which deals with the practical application of our faith in the challenges of the real world.

The Recipients of the Letter

The letter is general in its nature, and addressed to “...*the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia...*” (1:1:1 NKJV). Peter is quite specific as to which group of *dispersed pilgrims* that he has in mind, it is those who are “...*elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father...*” (1:1:2 NKJV). So, it is clearly written to Christians who have been dispersed. He is also quite specific about the geographical region to which the letter is addressed, and all of these were Roman provinces to the north of the Taurus Mountains in what is now modern-day Turkey.



It would appear that Peter had some form of association with these brethren, although we don't know when and how. The early part of the book of Acts deals with Peter's work in and around Jerusalem, and then after the death of Herod (Acts 12 – AD 44) Luke moves to focus mostly on the work of Paul. However, Peter was still in Jerusalem at the time of the Jerusalem conference (Acts 15 – AD 51). Extra-biblical evidence has Peter crucified at Rome at the same time as Paul was executed (AD 68).

If the *northern* Galatian region is what Peter has in mind (which fits with the northerly location of the other provinces mentioned), then we have no record of Paul having visited those areas to evangelise them, and it is quite likely that Peter may have done so after AD 51. It should also be noted that some of the brethren from Acts 2 came from those named provinces, and following the dispersion of Acts 8 would have likely returned home and established the churches there. Further, they would have had some association with Peter whilst they were in Jerusalem.

The Author of the Letter

The writer simply claims to be “*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ*”. There is only one Peter who was an apostle, and he was one of the three inner sanctum (Peter, James and John). He is always mentioned first in the lists of apostles, and he was the one to whom the Lord promised *the keys of the kingdom* (Mt 16:19). It was also Peter who preached the first gospel sermon (at Pentecost – Acts 2), and preached at the conversion of the first Gentiles (Acts 10 & 11).

The letter was scribed by Silas, the often time companion of Paul (1:5:12), and has a short note at the end penned in Peter's own hand (1:5:12-14).

However, some scholars have questioned the authorship of the letter, with the primary objection being the construction of the Greek language that is used in the letter. The argument is that Peter was a fisherman (along with his brother Andrew), and would have had only a poor general education. He was recognised as *uneducated and untrained* (Acts 4:13) and his native tongue would have been a Galilean dialect of Hebrew. He would not have had a good grasp of the Greek language that the letter was written in. Further, he quotes from the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), and such knowledge is inconsistent with his upbringing. In contrast to Peter's background, the letter is regarded as an excellent example of the use of the Greek language.

But most of the objectors seem to overlook that Peter was reciting the letter to Silas as his scribe. Silas may very well have corrected some of the poor language to give the letter its “polish”. Whilst some may object that this would mean that Silas was changing the thoughts that had been given to Peter through the Holy Spirit, and as such he had no authority to do so, we need to remember that God had a plan as to how the very words and thoughts that we read in the scriptures came to be just the way that they are! If we take the view that Silas only wrote down *exactly* what Peter told him to write, then we need to remember that these things were what the Holy Spirit had given to Peter. As a general rule, it can be said that the *thoughts* were given to the authors by inspiration, and the writers then expressed those thoughts into their own words. Hence we see different styles in the writings of the New Testament, but consistency in the message, and the absence of contradiction.

There are two tests which confirm the work as belonging to Peter – the internal evidence, and the external evidence:

Internal evidence for Peter’s authorship is strong. First and foremost he claims to be Peter the apostle, and that he was “a witness of the sufferings of Christ” (1:5:1). There are also similarities with some things that we might expect to find with Peter. He exhorts the elders to “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you” (1:5:2), which is quite reminiscent of Jesus’ instruction to him to “Feed my sheep” (Jn 21:15-17).

In addition, there are similarities between Peter’s sermons in Acts, including some references to the Holy Spirit (Acts 2; 1:1:12); The resurrection (Acts 2, 3, 4, & 10; 1:1:3,21; 1:3:18); and the Second Coming (Acts 3:20; 1:1:7, 13; 1:4:13). Whilst these things don’t prove authorship, they do provide some support to the claim by their association.

External evidence comes from some of the early christian writers including Irenaeus (AD 185), Tertullian (AD 200), Clement of Alexandria (AD 200). These writers all quote from the epistle and attribute the work to Peter. Other earlier writers quote from the epistle, although they do not name the author. These include Clement of Rome (AD 95), Polycarp (AD 155), and Justin Martyr (AD 165), which shows that the work was regarded as scripture at an early date. Origen created a catalogue of Canonical books, including the epistles of Peter, around AD 200 (or only about 100 years after the death of the last apostle, John). Eusebius quotes from the list in his Ecclesiastical History (Book 6; Chapter 25), and says:

And Peter, on whom the Church of Christ is built, 'against which the gates of hell shall not prevail,' has left one acknowledged epistle; perhaps also a second, but this is doubtful.

So, we can clearly see that there is strong evidence for the authorship of the first epistle, although it is perhaps not as strong for the authorship of the second.

Date and Occasion of the Letter

Occasion:

The early days of the christian church created little resistance from, or conflict with, the Roman government. As the church grew throughout the Roman Empire, it did so with quiet assimilation. However, under the latter days of Nero, the political climate changed significantly¹. This situation eventually resulted in the execution of both Peter and Paul.

An inevitable question amongst the christians would be whether such persecution would extend further than Rome, and would reach into the regions of northern Asia. Cogdill writes²:

When the Churches began to recognize this change in attitude upon the part of the Roman government, they became fearful of what the consequence would be. They had no organized resistance to withstand it, for this would be a violation of their own principle of peaceful obedience to the government and would only arouse further persecution against them. The question of whether or not they faced extinction and complete suppression no

¹ For a further discussion, see my Acts Study 42 – “The Political Situation in Rome”

² Cogdill, p. 155

doubt occurred, and in their minds was raised the question of what the outcome would be. They wondered if the brutality of Nero would be duplicated in the provinces. They were looking to their teachers and leaders for the answers to these questions.

First Peter was written in reply to this situation and under these circumstances as it affected the churches of northern Asia Minor and the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

Date:

Since Peter died around the same time as Paul, around May of AD 68 – about a month before Nero died, then the letter has to be written before that time. It also had to be written at a time when the persecution was beginning to spread – which makes it after AD 63 – as Paul was released from Nero’s custody at that time and went on his 4th missionary journey. A time between AD 65 and AD 67 would seem likely.

Further to understanding the date, is understanding where the letter was written from. Peter makes reference to Babylon – “...*She who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you: and so does Mark my son...*” (1:5:13 NKJV). This could be a euphemistic reference to Rome, as “Babylon” was often used in such a way, indicating a place of exile. Supporting that theory, in his last letter, Paul called for Mark to come to Rome (2 Tim 4:11). This would suggest that Mark had arrived before Paul and Peter were executed. However, the letter does not have the melancholy tenor of 2nd Timothy (Paul’s last letter), which would have to have been written about the same time. If Rome was the place of writing, then the time would likely have been late in the period (late AD 67 or even early AD 68).

Schreiner proposes authorship from Rome, but at an earlier date³:

Arguments from silence are notoriously slippery, but there are good grounds for thinking that Peter would have mentioned the Neroian persecution if it had started, so that he could remind believers in Asia Minor of the intensity of suffering experienced by Roman Christians. Therefore I would date the letter around AD 62-63 before the onset of the Neroian persecution.

The problem with authorship from Rome at such an early date, is that it places the writing at the time of Paul’s first Roman imprisonment. Whilst Paul mentions many of his fellow workers in the letters that he wrote at the time, he never mentions Peter, although John Mark was there at some time (Col 4:10).

Alternately, Peter may have actually been in Babylon. There was a large Jewish population there. However, for this to be the place of authorship would require Peter, Silas, and John Mark all to have been in Babylon. Prior to that time, there had been a general exodus from Babylon to Seleucia (Josephus, Antiq. 18:9:8-9), and at that time Babylon was in significant decline.

That Peter used Babylon as a euphemism for Rome, and that the letter was written from Rome is settled as best we can conclude the matter, by Eusebius (Book 2, Chapter 15):

And Peter makes mention of Mark in his first epistle which they say that he wrote in Rome itself, as is indicated by him, when he calls the city, by a figure, Babylon, as he does in the following words: "The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son."

So, in conclusion, the letter is placed as having been written from Rome after the close of the Acts narrative, and after Paul had left in AD 63, and before Peter’s execution in May AD 68.

The style of the letter

The letter’s primary purpose is to give encouragement and instruction for christian living in the face of suffering and hostility. Peter tends to jump from one theme to the other, and then back again time and time again.

³ Schreiner, p. 36

A key theme permeating the whole letter is the example of Christ in His suffering and overcoming through the resurrection. The letter is intensely practical, and Peter gives some specific instructions for dealing with the situations of life that they find themselves in.

Because of the general nature of the letter, it does not deal with specific issues that characterise some of Paul's letters to correct local problems. In fact, the letter is full of encouragement in the face of the trials and suffering.

Fee & Stuart⁴ note:

“ ...What propels the letter from beginning to end is their suffering. Peter's concern is that they understand their suffering in the larger context of God's saving purposes...”
and *“...At the same time Peter is greatly concerned about the way they live, both their conduct as a people together and the way they respond to suffering...”*

Outline of the letter

The following outline is adapted from Fee & Stuart⁵

- 1:1-2 *Salutation,*
- 1:3-12 *A Blessing of God*
- 1:13-2:10 *Call to Holy Living as God's People*
- 2:11-3:7 *The Call Particularized in Various Pagan Settings*
- 3:8-4:11 *The Call Generalized – in the Face of Hostility*
- 4:12-5:11 *Conclusion: Suffering, Hope, and Christian Conduct*
- 5:12-14 *Final Greetings*

Selected Bibliography

The following references will be used and quoted from during the studies. The full reference of the books are quoted here, and only their abbreviated title and page number will be quoted in the studies.

Cogdill

Cogdill, Roy E: “The New Testament: Book by Book – A 26 Lesson Outline series covering the entire New Testament”

Cogdill Foundation Publications, P.O. Box 403 Marion Ind. 46952

Dauids

Dauids, Peter H: “The First Epistle of Peter – New International Commentary on the New Testament”

William B Eermans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids MI 49503 ISBN 0-8028-2516-8

Eusebius

“The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus”

Baker Book House, Grand Rapids MI 49516 ISBN 0-8010-3306-3

Fee & Stuart

Gordon D Fee & Douglas Stuart: “How to Read the Bible Book by Book”

Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 49530 ISBN 0-310-21118-2

Kelcey

Kelcey, Ramond C: “The letters of Peter and Jude” The Living Word Commentary

R. B. Sweet Co.; Inc. Austin, Tx ISBN 0-8344-0073-1

Schreiner

Schreiner, Thomas R: “The New American Commentary; 1,2 PETER, JUDE”

Broadman & Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN. ISBN: 978-08054-0137-0

⁴ Fee & Stuart, p. 403

⁵ Fee & Stuart p. 404-406

Key points – Introduction & Conclusion

By looking at the introduction and conclusion to the letter, we can derive some of the key thoughts that Peter wants to bring out to the readers – especially when they appear in both the introduction and the conclusion.

Take some time to circle the key thoughts in each section, and then link the common ones together. The keys to the introduction are Peter's use of *Therefore...* as a call to action, and the short conclusion with a plea for action. ... Quotation is taken from the NIV.

^{1PE 1:1} Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, ² who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood:

Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

^{1PE 1:3} Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

^{1PE 1:10} Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, ¹¹ trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. ¹² It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

^{1PE 5:10} And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. ¹¹ To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

^{1PE 5:12} With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.

^{1PE 5:13} She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark. ¹⁴ Greet one another with a kiss of love.

Peace to all of you who are in Christ.