**1 Peter: An Introduction**

*1 Peter*

**Context**

History records many instances where the church of Jesus Christ has suffered persecution. Jesus told us that would be the case.

**Matthew 10:24-25**—*“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master.****25****It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household!”*

There has been (and always will be) a conflict between truth and error, the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness, or the sons of the kingdom and sons of the evil one.

**2 Corinthians 6:14**—*Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?*

The evil one and the world system he dominates (**2 Cor 4:4**) so hated the Truth, that he sought to eliminate it by killing the Lord of glory.

The prophet Isaiah foretold of such harsh treatment.

**Isaiah 53:3**—*He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.*

**John 1:10-11**—*He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.****11****He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.*

After the resurrection and ascension of Christ, the assaults were redirected to His followers. They were told by the religious leaders to stop preaching in the name of Jesus (**Acts 4:5-21**). Yet, they would not nor could not. As a result, the early apostles and followers (Peter, John, Stephen, Paul, etc) were arrested, beaten, put on trial, and ultimately killed.

**Acts 9:15-17**—*But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;****16****for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”****17****So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”*

As a result, suffering is a major theme throughout the New Testament. Paul speaks often of those hardships (**Rom 8:17-18; 2 Cor 1:5-7; Phil 1:29; 3:8-10; 1 Thes 2:14; 2 Thes 1:5; 2 Tim 1:8, 2:3**).

Hardships only became more organized and widespread as time continued. As Peter is writing this epistle, the official persecution began under the Emperor Nero. He was looking for scapegoats to divert the public’s suspicion of what he did by starting the great fire of Rome. It is because of Nero’s persecution that both Peter and Paul were martyred.

However, by God’s providence, he penned these words (canonized in Scripture) to offer encouragement and wisdom to beleaguered Christians throughout the centuries that follow. You and I are beneficiaries of the counsel and encouraging words of comfort as we face levels of persecution as well because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

**Romans 15:4***—For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

**Introduction**

1. **The Author: the Apostle Peter**

**1 Peter 1:1a***—Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ*

1. **Peter**
   1. He was selected by Christ as one of the original 12 apostles
   2. He was the leader and spokesman
   3. In all four lists of the apostles (**Matt 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:13-16; Acts 1:13**), he is listed first
   4. He had a brother named Andrew (who introduced him to Jesus (John 1:40-42)
   5. He ran a successful fishing business on the sea of Galilee
   6. He was originally from Bethsaida, but later moved to Capernaum (**Mark 1:21, 29**)
   7. He was married; Jesus healed his mother-in-law (**Luke 4:38-39**)
   8. His wife accompanied him on his missionary travels (**1 Cor 9:5**)
   9. Simon was his given name at birth
      1. Common name in first-century Palestine
      2. Scripture mentions eight other Simons in the NT
   10. Simon Barjona was his full name (**Matthew 16:17**) or “Simon son of Jonas”
   11. Jesus renamed him Cephas (Aramaic; **John 1:42**) at their first meeting which means “rock”
   12. “Peter” is the Greek equivalent
   13. Peter was sometimes called “Simon” in secular or neutral settings
       1. His house (**Luke 4:38**)
       2. His mother-in-law (**Mark 1:30**)
       3. His business (**Luke 5:3**)
   14. He was also called “Simon” in times when he was acting in a secular (or sinful) way
       1. **Matthew 17:24-25**—Peter’s confident assurance that Jesus would pay the temple tax
       2. **Mark 14:37**—Peter was asleep in the Garden of Gathsemane
       3. **Luke 5:4**—Put down our net for a catch and skepticism on Peter’s part
       4. **Luke 22:31**—“*Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat*” after the 12 argued who was the greatest and Jesus warned proud, overconfident Peter of is betrayal
       5. **Matthew 28:7**—after Peter was told to wait for Christ and he decided he was going fishing. Simon was asked 3 times of the Lord, do you love me? Then Jesus restores Peter.
   15. Peter witnesses the ascension of the Lord (**Acts 1**)
   16. The Holy Spirit a few weeks later descends on Peter and the rest of the apostles (**Acts 2**)
   17. He takes the lead on finding a replacement for Judas
   18. He preaches a significant sermon in **Acts 2 and 3** where thousands of people are saved
   19. He performed miraculous healings, boldly confronted the Jewish authorities and unhesitatingly discipline sinning church members (Ananias and Sapphira, **Acts 5**)
   20. He confronted Simon the magician (**Acts 8**)
   21. It was through his ministry that God used to open the understanding of the Gentiles being accepted into the church (**Acts 10:1-11:18**)
   22. After appearing at the Jewish counsel (**Acts 15:7-12**), we really don’t see him in the narrative portion of scripture
2. He authors just 2 epistles in the NT
3. Early church tradition places Peter in Rome at the end of his life. He likely was killed before Paul wrote Romans (c. 57AD), since his name does not appear in that epistle
   1. Nero died in 68 AD
   2. Peter was crucified with his wife; he was forced to watch her die
   3. He asked to be crucified upside down so as not to be crucified like his Lord
   4. Tradition holds that his faith during his death was so moving that his jailer came to faith
4. **The recipients: Scattered Christian Aliens**

**1 Peter 1:1b***—to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen*

1. Christians facing serious persecution
   1. They were aliens, who are strangers, who are foreigners in a hostile culture
   2. They are scattered
   3. Residing in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia
   4. Region within the Roman Empire
   5. Part of modern day Turkey
   6. The order of the towns listed may have been the traveled route for the letter’s distribution at the hand of Silvanus (**5:12**)
   7. Interesting side note: Paul was not allowed by the Spirit to enter Bithynia

**Acts 16:7**—*and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them*

1. The establishment of those churches is not clear—perhaps converts of Paul (**Acts 19:10, 26**) or possible the converts at Pentecost (**Acts 2**)
2. They were largely Gentiles

***1:14,18****—As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, ...**knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers*

***2:9-10****—But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;****10****for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

***4:3-4****—For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries.****4****In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you*

1. **The date and place of writing**

**1 Peter 5:13**—*She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark.*

1. Location: likely Rome
   1. Babylon is most likely a cryptic name for Rome, chosen because of the imperial capital’s debauchery and idolatry[[1]](#footnote-1)
   2. That characterizes Babylon of the end times (Cf. **Rev , 17, 18**)
2. Date:prior to July 19, 64 A.D.
   1. Likely before Nero’s persecution
   2. Just prior to the city of Rome set ablaze
   3. Peter doesn’t mention any of the martyrdoms that took place following the burning of the city; he likely would have otherwise
   4. This was written at a time when Christians were forced to suffer severe persecution and even the loss of their lives

***1:6****—In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials*

***2:20-21****—For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.****21****For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps*

***3:13****—Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?*

***4:12-13****—Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you;****13****but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.*

***4:19****—**Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.*

***5:10****—After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.*

1. **The theme and purpose for writing**

**1 Peter 5:12***—Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard him), I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!*

1. Peter wanted the Christians to stand firm
2. Steadfast in the face of increasing persecution and suffering
3. To aid them toward this goal:
   1. Remember your election and inheritance of eternity (1:4)
   2. The incredible privileges and blessings of knowing and being in Christ
   3. Instructions on how to live in a hostile environment
   4. Remember Christ our example and His sufferings
   5. We are to live victoriously and triumphantly through the suffering and not abandon hope, joy, faith by becoming bitter, overwhelmed, and disheartened
   6. Focus on the return of Christ, our conquering King who will come again
   7. Our obedience to the truth in the midst of the world’s antagonism, the beauty of the gospel is magnified
   8. In so doing, our lives testify to the truth (**2:12; 3:1, 13-17**)

**Conclusion**

The emphasis that Peter is making here is to teach these believers facing serious persecution how to live victoriously in the midst of hostility without losing heart. They need to know how to process life without wavering in faith or succumbing to the natural tendency to becoming bitter. The hope of the Christian is not found in this world, the circumstances of life, nor the difficulties faced. Our hope is in the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ (in His person and work) as well as the glorious promise of His coming again. In that day, all suffering will cease for those that are found to be in Him.

1. Ibid. p. 10 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)