

Lesson 1 - Introduction to 1 Peter

Author: Written by Peter

- This is the claim of the letter (1:1; 5:1), with the help of Silas (5:12; cf. Acts 15:22; 1 Thessalonians 1:1), and Mark (5:13; cf. Acts 12:12)
- Most prominent preacher in the beginning days of the church (Acts 1-10). His preaching was important enough to early church that tradition says Mark, a disciple, transmitted Peter's preaching in writing, which may be the Gospel of Mark.¹
- Was married (Matthew 8:14; Mark 1:30; Luke 4:38) and took his wife on journeys to churches (1 Corinthians 9:5)

Recipients

- A circular letter written to "God's elect, exiles scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia" (1:1) – places in northern Asia Minor or Modern Turkey. Pontus-Bithynia formed one province but are separated here because they form the beginning and end of the route Silas would take from Rome in bringing the letter to each of the provinces.
- Even though they were Gentile Christians (2:9-10; 4:3-4), Peter uses phrases from the Old Testament that describe how God *chose* Israel (Genesis 18:19; Isaiah 41:8), the family of Abraham, who was himself an *exile* and *wanderer* (Genesis 23:4). They are "scattered" (Gk., *diaspora*), which was the standard term for Jews living outside of Palestine. But through Jesus, these Christians are now part of the family of Abraham and are even referred to as "New Israel" (2:5, 9-10). One interpretation says 1 Peter's heavy Jewish tone indicates that recipients had a background in Judaism as proselytes or God-fearers, but it is just as likely that Peter adopts this terminology to give help them realize their special identity as the people God's Abrahamic promise.

Date and Provenance (place of origin or writing)

- Tradition says Peter and Paul were victims of persecution (1 Clement 5:4-7), which is commonly understood as the persecution by Nero that began after the great fire in Rome on July 19, 64 ad.
- Written from "Babylon" (5:13), which is probably a symbol for Rome (cf. Rev. 14:8; 17:5, 18).
- Probably written shortly before Nero's persecution in 62-64 ad, as the situation was intensifying.

Occasion and Purpose

- Recipients were amid a hostile society – *aliens* and *strangers*, 2:11-12.² Not "aliens and strangers" in the spiritual sense ("this world is not my home, I'm just a passin' through"), but a metaphor of severe social pressures. Because of their conversion they have become like foreigners in their own land, shunned and abused by their neighbors. This continues their identification with Israel, who were misunderstood and mistreated, looking for their true home in the promised land.
- Evidence of the recipients' suffering
 - 1:6 – "suffer grief in all kinds of trials"
 - 2:12 – "they accuse you of wrong-doing"
 - 2:13-17 (v. 15) – seemingly accused of subversiveness toward government
 - 2:18-24 – some, as slaves, were treated harshly, unjustly, with beatings and insults
 - 3:1-6 – Some lived in homes that were unfriendly to Christianity, wives may have been abused.
 - 3:16 – suffering, malicious talk, slander
 - 4:4 – social marginalization, ridicule regarding moral scruples
 - 4:12-19; 5:9 – general passages on suffering

¹ Papias, 60-130 ad, cited by Irenaeus, 175-195 ad, and Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.15, 324-325 ad.

² In O.T. (LXX), applied to Abraham in Canaan (Gen. 23:4; 26:3); Israel in Egypt (Gen. 15:13). In apocrypha, re: Judah in Babylon (1 Esdras 5:7) and later Jewish settlement in Egypt (3 Macc. 7:19). One way the New Testament refers to Christians in terms originally used of Israel.

- **Extent of their suffering**
 - The references to suffering (1:6; 2:12; 3:13-17; 4:12-19; 5:9) never use the more technical terms for state-inflicted persecution (Gk., *dioko* and *diogmos*, persecution)
 - 5:9 indicates that their suffering is experienced by Christians worldwide.
 - Their suffering was not such that they feared their lives, but was more general harassment in the form of economic injustice, ridicule, slander, social exclusion, domestic problems, mistreatment in the workplace, etc. Pagans were ignorant, skeptical, and suspicious of Christian belief, and resented that Christians no longer shared their lifestyle and were seen as “anti-social.”
- As they faced the difficult cultural environment, many of them were responding not from a posture of spiritual security, but of anxious insecurity.
 - Falling back into their former lifestyle (1:14; 2:11; 4:1-6)
 - Being hypocritical (2:1)
 - Showing disrespect to the government (2:13) and masters (2:18)
 - Perhaps taking out frustrations on their families (3:7?)
 - Retaliating (2:23; 3:9)
- This only made matters worse, allowed pagan neighbors to point accusing finger (2:12; 3:16-17).
- Peter writes to instruct them on how to maintain faith and behave in a hostile cultural environment.

1 Peter’s themes on thoughtful interaction with a faith-discrediting culture

Over-arching beliefs (from 1:3-12, the poetic introduction that conveys major themes)

1. **Radical hopefulness** (1:3) – irrational confidence that God’s purposes outlast momentary disappointments and God’s values outweigh evil counterfeits.
2. **Transcendent Security** (1:4-5) – solid anchoring in the certainty of one’s eternal destiny that eclipses fear and intimidation by earthly power or threat and endures unpleasant earthly experiences as temporary “bluffs.”
3. **Redemptive Adversity** (1:6-7) – Deep inward joy that enables one to interpret difficult life encounters as opportunities for faith refinement that bring the believer closer to the goal of faith, salvation in Jesus Christ.
4. **Prophetic Insight** (1:10-12) – Possession of the knowledge of the sufferings of Christ and the glories that follow that allow believers to know the real score – what life really means and where it is headed.

Resulting Behaviors and Attitudes

1. Responding to a Hostile Culture

- Do not surprised by suffering (4:12); it is part of the ongoing battle between God and Satan (5:8-9) and heralds the final judgment (4:17-18)
- Accept suffering as an opportunity for God to refine your faith – 1:6-7
- Live honorable and holy lives – 1:14-16, 18, 22; 2:1, 5, 9, 11-12, 15, 20; 3:6, 15, 17; 4:1-6
- Endure suffering – 1:6-8; 2:18-25; 3:13-17; 4:1-6, 12-19; 5:8-9, 10
- Live within social structures – 2:13-17, 18-25; 3:1-6, 7, 8-12
- Be respectful of outsiders – 2:11-12
- In the meantime, help one another and show loving concern lest the members of God’s flock be injured (4:8, 10; 5:1-2)

2. **Exemplary, respectable lifestyle that wins the commendation and respect of outsiders** (2:12; 2:15; 3:1; 3:16; 4:15-19)

3. **Submission to the order of the day: governmental (2:13), labor/economic (2:18) and domestic (3:1-6)** – even to the extent of enduring unjust suffering if there is no respectable way to defend one’s rights under that social order (2:18-24; 3:13-17; 4:1; 4:12-19). Even in these situations, as well as in more hostile occasions, a respectful defense of one’s legitimate rights may be appropriate (cf. Acts 22:23-29)
4. **Thoughtful, respectful defense of one’s convictions** (3:15)
5. **Mental discipline and intellectual readiness** (1:13; 3:15; 4:7)
6. **Self-control and prayerfulness** (1:13; 4:7; 5:8-9)
7. **Undistracted living focused on Christian hope** (1:13)
8. **Holiness, moral excellence, and clear conscience** (1:14; 2:11; 3:16; 4:1-6)
9. **Reverence and holy fear of God above man** (1:17-21; 3:14; cf. Acts 4:19-20)
10. **Christian community**
 - Genuine, heart-felt love for others (1:22-2:3; 4:8)
 - Harmonious, sympathetic, compassionate, and humble (3:8)
 - Non-retaliatory (2:22-23; 3:9; 4:12-14)
 - Truthful, non-slandering speech (3:10)
 - Peace-loving (3:12)
 - Hospitable (4:9)
 - Service for the common good (4:10-11)
 - Non-domineering, humble (5:1-4)
11. **Sacrificial devotion to our exalted mission, regardless of the low value the world places upon the same** (2:1-10)

Outline of 1 Peter

1. Salutation (1:1-2)
2. Our Salvation and its Implications (1:3-2:10)
 - A. Salvation into a new hope, a new identity, and a new family (1:3-12), which allow them to experience suffering like a fire that burns away false hopes and distractions (1:6-7).
 - B. Life Values based on Salvation (1:13-2:10)
 1. Hope (1:13)
 2. Holiness (1:14-16)
 3. Fearfulness/Reverence (1:17-21)
 4. Love (1:22-24)
 5. Growth (2:1-8)
 6. Identity as God’s People (2:9-10)
3. Lifestyle Implications of Our Salvation (2:11-4:19)
 - A. General Principles: Holiness and exemplary Christian living – the strongest ethical exhortation in the book (2:11-12)
 - B. Behavior in Certain Groups – how the general principle in 2:11-12 applies to life situations faced by the recipients (2:13-3:12), embodying the principle that as God-liberated people, they should use their freedom in the special witness of submission and showing love and generosity to their enemies (2:13, 18; 3:1)
 1. Government (2:13-17)
 2. Slave/Master Relationships (2:18-25)

3. Wives to husbands (3:1-6)
 4. Husbands to wives (3:7)
 5. The family of God (3:8-12)
- C. Behavior in Suffering in Light of Eventual Vindication (3:13-4:19)
1. Maintain Good Behavior so that when you do suffer, it is not because of your own evil behavior (3:13-22)
 2. Arm yourselves against the pressure to conform (4:1-6)
 3. Pull together in the church (4:7-11)
 4. Rejoice in Christ's sufferings, continue to do good, and commit yourselves to a faithful God (4:12-19)
- D. Behavior in the Church (5:1-9)
1. Shepherd faithfully (5:1-5)
 2. Follow humbly (5:6-7)
 3. Resist Satan firmly (5:8-9)
4. Doxology (5:10-11)
 5. Conclusions (5:12-14)

Resources

- Overview of 1 Peter in *The Bible Project*, <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/1-peter/>

Practical Commentaries

- Dennis Edwards, *1 Peter*, in *The Story of God Bible Commentary*, edited by Tremper Longman III and Scot McKnight (Zondervan/Harper Collins, 2017).
- Scot McKnight, *1 Peter*, in *The NIV Application Commentary* (Zondervan, 1996).
- James Thompson, *The Church in Exile: God's Counter-Culture in a Non-Christian World* (Leafwood Publishing, 2011).

In-depth Commentary

- Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter, Second Edition* in *The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Baker Academic, 2022).