

NAME

The title of the epistle, "Petrou A" (Πετροῦ Α), is taken from the name of the attributive author, Peter. The letter is named "First Peter" to distinguish it from Peter's second canonical epistle.

AUTHOR

Laney:

The author of the epistle is named in the first verse as "*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.*" While some scholars have rejected the genuineness of the book, both internal and external evidence weigh against this critical opinion. The author demonstrates an intimate acquaintance with the life and teachings of Christ (compare 5:5 with John 13:3-5), and 5:2 with John 21:15-17). The author was clearly an eyewitness of the sufferings of Christ (2:19-24; 3:18; 4:1; 5:1) as the apostle Peter was. There is a remarkable similarity between Peter's speeches in Acts and his words in the epistle (compare Acts 2:32-36; 10:34,41 with 1 Peter 1:21; Acts 4:10,11 with 1 Peter 2:7,8; Acts 10:34 with 1 Peter 1:7). In 2 Peter 3:1 Peter himself makes reference to his earlier epistle.

In addition to this substantial internal evidence for the authenticity of First Peter, the epistle was universally recognized by the early church. Polycarp (150 A.D.) quotes the letter in his epistle to the Philippians. Irenaeus (c. 170 A.D.) quotes First Peter by name in his *Against Heresies*. Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian assumed Petrine authorship without question, and echoes of the epistle have been found in the writings of Clement of Rome (c. 96 A.D.). Evidence supporting the authenticity of the epistle appears to be abundant. It should be noted that Silvanus (probably a form of the name "Silas") served as Peter's amanuensis for this epistle (5:12).

Peter is probably one of the most loved personalities of the New Testament for believers everywhere can identify with his failures and yet appreciate his admirable qualities. Simon Peter, originally from Bethsaida (John 1:44), was the son of Jonas (Matthew 16:17) and the brother of Andrew with whom he was a partner in a fishing business in Capernaum.

Peter first met Jesus near Bethany beyond the Jordan when he was led to the Lord by Andrew and received his name Cephas (Aramaic) or Peter (Greek), meaning "rock" (John 1:42). Although he was married at the time (Mark 1:30), Peter later responded to Christ's call in Galilee to become a disciple (Mark 1:16-18). Some time later Peter was chosen by Christ to become an apostle (Mark 3:14).

Peter was a natural leader and often a spokesman for the Twelve (Matthew 16:15,16). With James and John he belonged to the innermost circle of the Twelve and was present at the raising of Jarius' daughter (Mark 5:37), the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1,2), Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36), and the empty tomb (John 20:6). Peter's denial of Christ was not the result of premeditated malice, but of fleshly self-confidence (Matthew 26:36) and sudden panic (Matthew 26:69-75). He was restored to fellowship with Christ after the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:5).

Peter took a position of leadership among the disciples after Christ's ascension (Acts 1:15-26) and was the key preacher on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). With John he later healed a lame man and preached a sermon in the portico of the temple (Acts 3:11-26). He was arrested and tried by the Sanhedrin, but released (Acts 4:1-21). Peter led the church in dealing with the sin of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11).

The Apostle Peter was God's instrument to open the way of salvation to the Samaritans (Acts 8:14-25) and the Gentiles (Acts 10-11). Although imprisoned by Herod Agrippa I in 44 A.D. he was

miraculously released and later was a spokesman at the Jerusalem Council after Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 15:7-11). Peter was rebuked by Paul at Antioch for hypocritically withdrawing from fellowship with Gentile believers when Jewish visitors were in town (Galatians 2:11-14). In later years Peter traveled in an itinerant ministry with his wife (1 Corinthians 1:12; 9:5).

According to early Christian literature Peter went to Rome (c. 62 A.D.) and there was crucified during the Neroian persecution which began in the summer of 64 A.D. Peter's martyrdom is hinted at by Christ in John 21:18,19. According to the Acts of Peter and Eusebius, citing Origen, Peter insisted on being crucified head-downward (Historia Ecclesiastica 3:1).

DATE

Laney:

Although Eusebius dates the death of Peter and Paul in the fourteenth year of Nero (67-68 A.D.), he also places the Neronian persecutions in the fourteenth year, which from other sources can be definitely dated in 64 A.D. It is probable that Peter's martyrdom took place in 64 A.D. and First Peter would, therefore, have been written before that date. On July 18, 64 A.D. Rome began to burn and Nero turned the blame from himself to the Christians whom he used as a scapegoat. The contents of the epistle reflect impending persecution which suggests that the epistle was written not long before Peter's death. Peter's teaching that the government may be expected to administer justice (2:3-14), and that a man who does good would be unmolested (3:13) would indicate that Peter wrote before the severe persecutions were actually under way in Rome.

The epistle is traditionally dated between 63 and 65 A.D. Peter arrived in Rome in 62 A.D. and probably wrote this epistle in 63 A.D. or early 64 A.D.. This dating seems to fit the circumstances of the epistle. While the "fiery trial" of 4:12 is impending there is no certain evidence that this official persecution extended beyond Rome. However, it may have been experienced in other locations through out the Empire as local provincial governors, who themselves were anti-Christian, followed the example of the Emperor. This would have most probably been the case in Asia Minor (see RECIPIENTS - Historical Setting).

THEME

Halley (page 44): *"To A Persecuted Church"*

Mitchell: *"Hope in the Midst of Suffering."*

Laney: *"Suffering as a Christian and how to endure it triumphantly."*

The purpose of the epistle is to exhort the readers to conduct themselves in accordance with the living hope they possess as redeemed believers. The epistle is intended to confirm the believer's knowledge of salvation and to encourage them in their submission to authority and joyful response to suffering for Christ's sake.

Key Word (Nelson's): Suffering For The Cause of Christ - The basic theme of 1 Peter is the proper response to Christian suffering. Knowing that his readers will be facing more persecution than ever before, Peter writes to give a divine perspective so that they will be able to endure without wavering.

Key Verses (Nelson's):

"Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours

searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit or Christ in them was indicating when He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.” (1 Peter 1:10-12)

“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when this glory is revealed.” (1 Peter 4:12,13)

Key Chapter (Nelson’s): 4 - Central in the New Testament revelation concerning how to handle persecution and suffering caused by one’s Christian testimony is 1 Peter 4. Christ’s suffering to be our model (4:1,2), but we also are to rejoice in that we can share in His suffering (4:12-14).

CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOR IN A PAGAN SOCIETY - 1 Peter 2,3 (Nelson’s)

Christians are exhorted to be...

Good citizens (2:13,14)

Obedient servants (2:18)

Submissive wives (3:1)

Considerate husbands (3:7)

Compassionate brothers and sisters (3:8)

Because...

Foolish men will be silenced (2:15)

Christ is our example (2:21)

Some unbelieving husbands will be won by their example (3:1,2)

Their prayers will be heard (3:7)\

They will inherit a blessing (3:9)

Mitchell:

Peter writes this letter to give hope in the midst of suffering. While the chief word of the epistle is “suffering” (17 times), the word “hope” (5 times) gives the proper perspective to the suffering. Believers can therefore be glad even in the midst of suffering. Trials are actually the way God develops and purifies us. The day of trial will be short in comparison with the joy that lies ahead. One day soon we shall actually be in our Lord’s presence ruling and reigning with Him! What greater impetus could there be for the believer to “hang in there” with tough, persistent Godly living.

Outline:

- I. The Believer’s Salvation 1:1-2:10
 - A. The foundation 1:3-12
 - B. The Features 1:13-2:10
- II. The Believer’s Submission 2:11-3:12
 - A. The appeal 2:11,12
 - B. The description of submission 2:13-3:12
- III. The Believer’s Suffering 3:13-4:19
 - A. Experience of suffering 3:13-17
 - B. Example of suffering 3:18-22

C. End of suffering 4:1-6

D. Exhortations in suffering 4:7-19

IV. The Believer's Supervision 5:1-14

RECIPIENTS

Adapted from Mitchell:

The epistle is addressed to the believers scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. The word "scattered" (diasporas - διασπορᾶς) is a technical term that often has reference to Jews who live outside Palestine. This scattering is said to be among "the Gentiles" (2:12; 4:3). Because of this, many feel that the letter is directed to Jewish Christians scattered outside Palestine.

But much in the epistle indicates that most of the readers were of Gentile background (2:10; 4:3), though some may have been Hebrew-Christians (2:12; 4:3): 1) Before salvation they were idolaters (4:3); and 2) Before their salvation, they were characterized as "*not a people*" (2:10). How could this be said of the Jews?

It is possible that Peter is using the term "Gentile" figuratively to refer to non-Christians. It should also be noted that the term "scattered" (1:1) has no definite article (as does James), and is probably used in a non-technical sense for all Christians scattered throughout the known world.

The believers reside in a region north of the Taurus mountains where the apostle Paul had not preached (Acts 16:6,7).

Historical Setting:

Laney:

It would appear that the sufferings of the readers of Peter's epistle were of a general, non-official character which were common to first century Christians. The suffering is referred to as "various trials" (1:6) and appears to be a more personal nature (2:15). The persecution was resulting from the refusal of the believers to join in the sinful pleasures that they had once participated in (4:1-4). The trials of the readers were common to first century Christians. Peter, anticipating more intense persecution in Rome, wrote to the believers in the provinces to encourage them in their present struggle.

The place of writing is "Babylon" (5:13). Babylon in Mesopotamia was deserted at this time and Peter is not known to have journeyed to that region of the Near East. The order of the provinces named in the address (1:1) would suggest that the author was west of this region. The majority of scholars favor Rome as the place of writing taking "Babylon" as a symbolic designation from Rome as in Revelation 17:5,9 and 18:2,10,21. This view would find support from the fact that Mark who was with Peter (5:13) was also in Rome with Paul during his imprisonment (Colossians 4:10).

CONTRIBUTION TO CANON

The epistle gives the believer tremendous hope in the midst of suffering.

The epistle affirms the basis of the believer's salvation.

The epistle encourages submission to authority for Christ's sake.

Peculiarities:

Mitchell:

1. This book has proportionately more quotations from the Old Testament than any other book of the New Testament.
2. There are occasional reminiscences of the phraseology of Christ (2:12 and Matthew 5:16; 2:17 and Matthew 22:21; 3:13 and John 14:1)
3. The word "church" is never mentioned. This is most unusual if it is true as some contend, that Peter was the head of the church.

RESOURCES

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Robert H. Gundry, Ph.D., *A Survey Of The New Testament*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing House, 1970

Halley, Henry H. *Halley's Bible Handbook*, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Zondervan Publishing House

Horton, David, General Editor. *The Portable Seminary*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Bethany House Publishers, 2006

Nelson's Quick Reference - Bible Maps And Charts, Nashville, Tennessee; Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1994

As general resources I've relied on my class notes from various professors at Biola University (especially those of Dr. Curtis Mitchell), Western Conservative Baptist Seminary (WCBS - [especially those of Dr. J. Carl Laney]), and Talbot Seminary as well as notes shared with me by Annie Kartozián.

Additional reference material has come from the study Bibles of the English Standard Version, New American Standard Version, and The New Living Translation.

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