

I PETER

“A NEW AND LIVING HOPE”

Blessed be the God
and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!
According to his great mercy,
he has caused us to be
born again to a

LIVING HOPE

through the resurrection of
Jesus Christ from the dead ...

FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH & ZION LUTHERAN CHURCH
ADULT BIBLE CLASS SERIES

1 Peter 1:3

LOGOS

*HUMBLE YOURSELVES, THEREFORE, UNDER THE MIGHTY HAND OF GOD SO THAT AT
THE PROPER TIME HE MAY EXALT YOU, CASTING ALL YOUR ANXIETIES ON HIM,
BECAUSE HE CARES FOR YOU.*

INTRODUCTION

MAIN THOUGHT

Peter's first epistle reminds Christians who were facing increasingly difficult and painful persecutions for their faith in Jesus of their heavenly inheritance, encouraging them to live lives of submission to God's will. He holds before us both the suffering of Jesus and the outcome of it as an assurance that through suffering God is still working a far greater good.

“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.”

(1 Peter 3:18)

AUTHORSHIP

The First Epistle of Peter opens with a claim to authorship by the disciple whom Jesus called “Peter.” That claim has, from the beginning of modern critical study, been a point of contention. Many scholars have argued that the stylistic polish of the Greek and the breadth of its vocabulary make it unlikely that a Galilean fisherman—such as Peter was—could have produced such an astute text. This objection rests on the assumption that cultural background and occupational identity necessarily determine intellectual and literary capacity. It is a view rooted in a kind of societal reductionism, in which the individual is confined to the narrow expectations of class and circumstance.

Yet such an approach overlooks both the transformative nature of Peter's life experience and the broader pattern evident throughout biblical history. Again and again, the scriptural narrative insists that those who appear ordinary, even unqualified, are precisely the ones through whom something extraordinary is spoken or accomplished by God. The shepherd becomes king, the exile becomes prophet, the persecutor of Jewish Christians becomes the apostle to the Gentiles. Peter's authorship, questioned on the basis of style, is in fact consistent with this pattern: the unlikeliest voice, sharpened by suffering and responsibility, becomes a vehicle for wisdom that transcends its origin.

There are compelling reasons to take the claim of Petrine authorship at face value. The letter itself begins by naming Peter as its author, and in the ancient world such a claim was not lightly made. The early Church possessed a rigorous instinct for discernment: texts falsely attributed to apostolic figures were quickly identified and rejected. The fact that this epistle was not discarded, but instead preserved and transmitted as authoritative, strongly suggests that the community nearest to its origin recognized its authenticity.

Further evidence lies within the texture of the letter itself. The epistle contains references to the life and teaching of Jesus that bear the mark of direct recollection. These are not abstract reflections at a distance but the words of one who had stood in the company of Christ. This is consistent with the promise that Jesus Himself gave to His disciples—that the Spirit would bring to their remembrance all He had said. What emerges in this text, then, is not merely human recollection, but memory shaped and enlivened by the Spirit's activity.

Finally, the voice of the letter resonates with what we encounter elsewhere in the New Testament where Peter speaks. The sermon preserved in Acts 2, for instance, carries a strikingly similar cadence of thought and tone. Both epistles that bear Peter's name exhibit this same blend of bold proclamation and humbled submission to divine will. The style is direct, but it is also tempered by the experience of failure and restoration. It is a voice marked not by literary artifice, but by the authenticity of one who has been profoundly remade by what he has witnessed.

DATE

The letter itself provides a clue to its date of origin. In 5:13, the writer states that it was composed from "Babylon." The designation is ambiguous. It could point to the literal city on the Euphrates, but it may also function symbolically, as a veiled reference to Rome. The ambiguity has generated centuries of discussion.

Historically, Babylon had been the greatest city of its age. In the seventh and sixth centuries before Christ, it stood as the most powerful and wealthy metropolis in the world. Its sudden collapse, however, is one of the defining moments of antiquity. In 539 BC, the city fell in a single night, as prophesied in Isaiah 13 and recorded in Daniel 5. Herodotus confirms the event: Babylon was overrun and burned, its destruction so thorough that by the first century it scarcely existed even as ruins. The name, once synonymous with splendor, became instead a cipher for corruption, judgment, and the collapse of arrogant power.

It is this symbolic freight that the New Testament takes up. In Revelation, John repeatedly employs "Babylon" as a term for that force which wages war against God's people (14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21). In his day, that force came from two unmistakable sources. One was Rome—at first as imperial persecutor under the Caesars, later as a religious authority that claimed divine sanction under the papacy. For that reason, many conclude that Peter uses "Babylon" as a designation for Rome. According to the early church fathers Eusebius (circa 200 AD) and Tertullian, Peter had visited Rome at this approximate time.

Many Lutheran commentators have hesitated at this conclusion, not just out of concern that it might lend support to the Roman Catholic assertion of Peter as the first pope, but also because there is no witness from the time that relays Peter's presence in Rome ever. Those who hold to this position still consider the phrase "Babylon" to be used metaphorically, but of another city oppressing God's people, namely Jerusalem. Indeed, the Jews grew continually hostile toward Christians until the Lord finally fulfilled His prophetic judgment against Jerusalem in the Olivet Discourse in 70 AD, when *not one stone was left upon another*.

In either case, Peter's point remains the same...

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 his glory is revealed.

(1 Peter 4:12-13)

In either case, this puts the date of writing sometime between Nero's persecution and the destruction of Jerusalem. Most commentators have accepted the date of writing to be likely in 64 AD.

RECIPIENTS

As mentioned, this letter was written to those dispersed throughout modern Turkey. The five names of their locations were Roman provinces. Their general locations are seen in the following map.



Who were these exiles and where were they dispersed from and by whom? All of these become important questions in considering the content of the letter.

In John 7:35 we find the term in reference to Jews who were scattered by the Babylonians 600 years earlier.

The Jews said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?"

Peter, however, redefines the terms, as is obvious throughout the letter, to refer not specifically to Jews who had been displaced but to Christians, whether Jew or Gentile, who have been scattered by any and all persecutions. In the very first verse, he refers to the recipients of the letter as *elect*, which is a loaded theological term used in reference to those whom God Himself chose for salvation. Then, in the next verse, he emphasizes this understanding.

According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood.

(1 Peter 1:2)

In making use of *diaspora*, a term originally used by Jews to referred to the dislocated Jews, but now using it in reference to Christians, whether Jews or Gentiles, Peter's point is that they are all united by their common faith in Jesus and should consider their sufferings and trials in that light. These "exiles," then, would have included those from the Babylonian captivity, those from the persecution of Christians by the Jews shortly after Jesus' ascension, and now also those Christians dislocated from Rome where Nero had ordered Christians to be arrested and to be put to death, as the first century historian, Tacitus, records. Many of them would have been those that fled that persecution.

LITERARY STYLE

Those familiar with the Greek language have often referred to Peter as "Participle Peter," based on his grammatical style of using participles to combine thought after thought. Some Greek grammarians have concluded that Peter barely "takes a breath" until the end of chapter one, insinuating that the entirety of the first chapter comprises nothing more than run-on sentences. There is some truth in that observation, when viewed strictly through a grammatical lens.

However, thematically, the entire chapter hangs together as a cohesive thought, explaining his use of participles. The following is a more literal translation of the first chapter:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the one who are elected, exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

Blessed the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the one according to his great mercy having begotten us again into a living hope through resurrection of Jesus Christ from out of the dead, into an inheritance imperishable and undefiled and unfading, having been kept in the heavens for you, the ones by God's power being guarded through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time, in which you exult, a little now, if it is necessary, having been grieved in various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold, the perishing one though through fire being tested—may be found to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom not having seen you love, in whom now not seeing but believing you exult with joy inexpressible and having been glorified, receiving the end of your faith, salvation of souls, concerning which salvation prophets sought out and searched carefully, the ones concerning the grace unto you having prophesied, searching into what or what sort of time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating, testifying beforehand the sufferings unto Christ and the glories after these, to whom it was revealed that not to themselves but to you they were serving them, the things now announced to you through the ones proclaiming the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, into which things angels desire to look.

Therefore, having girded up the loins of your mind, being sober, set your hope completely upon the grace being brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ, as children of obedience not being conformed to the former desires in your ignorance but according to the Holy One having called you also yourselves be holy in all conduct because it has been written “You shall be holy, because I am holy,” and if you call upon as Father the one impartially judging according to the work of each conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your sojourning knowing that not with perishable things, silver or gold, you were redeemed from your futile way of life handed down from your fathers but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, of Christ, having been foreknown before the foundation of the world but having been manifested at the last of the times for you, the ones through him believing in God the one having raised him from the dead and having given him glory so that your faith and hope are in God, having purified your souls by obedience to the truth for sincere brotherly love, loving one another fervently from a pure heart having been begotten again not from perishable seed but imperishable through the living and abiding word of God because, “All flesh is as grass, and all its glory as the flower of grass; the grass was withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever,”

Now, this word is the good news that was preached to you.

As far as thought process, the entirety of the letter presents Christ not merely as the believer’s example, but as the believer’s hope in times of suffering. Christ’s suffering affords believers comfort in the midst of the sufferings which will naturally come upon them as His followers (cf. John 15:19-20):

If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.

In these sufferings, we Christians are given opportunities to “arm yourselves with the same way of thinking.” (4:1)

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,

More than that, Peter appeals to believers, having presented their relationships in the world, to have an attitude of submission as the path to true freedom. Submission for the Lord’s sake to those in government, society, and family authority fosters a good testimony to those who are outside of the Church, when they see your conduct.

THEME AND OUTLINE

The following theme and outline serve as a useful and brief presentation of the message of 1 Peter:

THE BELIEVER’S HOPE IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING

Part One: The Salvation of the Believer in Christ

- I. Salvation in Christ
- II. Sanctification through Christ.

Part Two: The Submission of the Believer to the Will of God

- I. Submission to government
- II. Submission to masters
- III. Submission in marriage
- IV. Submission in suffering

Part Three: The Joy of the Believer to Suffer with Christ

- I. Joy in suffering
- II. Christ's example in suffering
- III. Christian love in suffering
- IV. Pastoral care for the suffering