

# 1 PETER

## Introductory Notes by Michael Hite

### AUTHORSHIP

The book is universally recognized as a work of the Apostle Peter in the early church. Besides being historically attested by historians, there is great internal evidence as well. The writer describes himself as:

1. Peter, and apostle of Jesus Christ (1:1) - one sent with a message
2. an elder in the church (5:1) - this seems to show that Peter is fulfilling the charge given to him by Jesus Himself in John 21:15-17 - “Shepherd (*poimainō*) my sheep”
3. He claims to have been “a witness to the suffering of Christ” (5:1)
4. a partaker of the glory to be revealed (5:1)

### BACKGROUND AND DESTINATION

The “elect” in verse 1 illustrates that the Epistle was written to Christians.

### DATE

The people to whom Peter wrote were under great persecution (3:17; 4:12-19), but it seems that the persecution was more verbal than physical at this point (4:14-15). It is strongly believed that the Epistle was written after the prison epistles of Paul (62-63), so it is placed about 65 AD two years before Peter was crucified by Nero (68 AD) (according to Eusebius).

### PLACE OF WRITING

There is a great deal of controversy as to the location of Peter in writing this letter. The only indication from the text is found in 5:13, “She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings...”

***Babylon, the city on the Euphrates river*** - If 5:13 it to be taken literally, then Babylon here would refer to the city on the Euphrates river (approx. 550 miles east of Jerusalem). This once great city was the center of the empire responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. and took the Jewish people into captivity.

There are a few problems with this view however. 1) Peter is mostly known for work in the church of the west not the east and Babylon would be the far east. 2) Many historians place Babylon at this time as nothing more than an insignificant village at the time of Peter’s writing.

**Rome** -Many believe the Peter is referring to Rome as Babylon in the same way that John will when he writes Revelation 18:2. John uses the figurative term Babylon for Rome to express the immoral climate, oppression and godlessness of that city. Peter may well be doing the same here.

It is important to note that many in the Reformation, in an effort to deny Peter as the first Pope argued that Peter was never even in Rome. There are many today that continue that line of thinking, however, the early church does not support that view. Eusebius notes that both Paul and Peter were executed by Nero in Rome - “It is, therefore, recorded that Paul was beheaded in Rome itself, and that Peter likewise was crucified under Nero” (Eusebius. *The Church History of Eusebius*. 2.25.5). He goes on to record that Dionysius claimed that Peter and Paul “suffered martyrdom at the same time” (Eusebius. *The Church History of Eusebius*. 2.25.8).

The tradition that Peter suffered martyrdom in Rome is as old and as universal as that in regard to Paul, but owing to a great amount of falsehood which became mixed with the original tradition by the end of the second century the whole has been rejected as untrue by some modern critics, who go so far as to deny that Peter was ever at Rome. (See especially Lipsius’ *Die Quellen der römischen Petrus-Sage*, Kiel, 1872; a summary of his view is given by Jackson in the *Presbyterian Quarterly and Princeton Review*, 1876, p. 265 sq. In Lipsius’ latest work upon this subject, *Die Acta Pauli und Petri*, 1887, he makes important concessions.) **The tradition is, however, too strong to be set aside, and there is absolutely no trace of any conflicting tradition. We may therefore assume it as overwhelmingly probable that Peter was in Rome and suffered martyrdom there.** His martyrdom is plainly referred to in [John xxi. 10](#), though the place of it as not given. The first extra-biblical witness to it is Clement of Rome. He also leaves the place of the martyrdom unspecified (*Ad Cor.* 5), but he evidently assumes the place as well known, and indeed it is impossible that the early Church could have known of the death of Peter and Paul without knowing where they died, and there is in neither case a single opposing tradition. **Ignatius (Ad Rom. chap. 4) connects Paul and Peter in an especial way with the Roman Church, which seems plainly to imply that Peter had been in Rome.** Phlegon (supposed to be the Emperor Hadrian writing under the name of a favorite slave) is said by Origen (*Contra Celsum*, II. 14) to have confused Jesus and Peter in his *Chronicles*. This is very significant as

implying that Peter must have been well known in Rome. Dionysius, quoted below, distinctly states that Peter labored in Rome, and Caius is a witness for it. So Irenaeus, Clement, Tertullian, and later Fathers without a dissenting voice. The first to mention Peter's death by crucifixion (unless [John xxi. 18](#) be supposed to imply it) is Tertullian (*De Proescrip. Hoer.* chap. 36), but he mentions it as a fact already known, and tradition since his time is so unanimous in regard to it that we may consider it in the highest degree probable. On the tradition reported by Origen, that Peter was crucified head downward, see below, Bk. III. chap. 1, where Origen is quoted by Eusebius (text in footnote 310 - Eusebius. *The Church History of Eusebius*. 2.25.5)

Some have expressed concern over this view based on Paul's statement in 2 Tim 4:16, "at my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me.." The argument is made that if Peter was in Rome at the end of Paul's ministry, he would be one of those deserting Paul here. If Eusebius' account is correct it may well be that Peter is suffering the same persecution as Paul at this time and is unable to support Paul at his trial or that he had not yet arrived in Rome when Paul's first trial occurred.

## **AUDIENCE**

The book is written to "those who reside as aliens...who are chosen" – scattered (diaspora) throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia. This list of Roman provinces may show that

1. the letter was meant to be circulated over a large area
2. may indicate the path the letter was to take in being spread

Silvanus was probably the bearer of the letter, and probably acted as the secretary for Peter's dictation as well (5:12-13).

There is some hint that he was writing to Gentile Christians:

- 1 Peter 2:9-10
- 1 Peter 1:14
- 1 Peter 1:18
- 1 Peter 1:20
- 1 Peter 3:6
- 1 Peter 3-5



## KEYWORDS IN THE BOOK

39x - God (theos)  
23x - Christ (Xristos)  
17x - suffer (pascho)  
15x - do, make happen (poieo)  
14x - glory (dokeo)  
14x - joy/grace (chairō)  
13x - good/right (agathos)  
12x - evil/wrong (kakos)  
12x - faith/believe (pisteuo)  
12x - holy (hagios)  
10x - life (zao)  
10x - called (kaleo)  
10x - spirit (pneuma)  
9x - honor, precious/value (time)  
9x - house/dwelling (oikos)  
8x - fear (phobos)  
8x - behavior (anastrophe)  
8x - salvation (sodzo)  
8x - reveal (kalupto)  
7x - submit (tasso)

### Theme

You have been **called**(10x) by **God**(39x) to a **life**(10x) **holy**(12x) in **behavior**(8x), **doing**(15x) **good**(13x) rather than **evil**(12x), firm in **faith**(12x), **submitting**(7x) in **fear**(8x) of the Lord, even while **suffering**(17x), which brings His **grace**(14x) and will result in **glory**(14x) , **honor**(9x) and **salvation**(8x) when He is **revealed**(8x).

### PURPOSE FOR WRITING

Peter wrote to encourage the believers in their present trials to admonish them to hold on to the life that would give them salvation (1:1-12), which came through the grace of God (1:13). This is clearly seen in the purpose statement contained in the book - “***I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!***” (5:12). The Christians here needed to be reminded of the value of the inheritance they have and the

assurance of the salvation that is provided by God into eternity. Peter's focus is to TESTIFY to this fact (1:1-12) and EXHORT them to never give it up - even if it causes them some temporary suffering (1:6-7)

## **KEY PASSAGES**

**1 Peter 1:7** - so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

**1 Peter 3:13-15** - Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence...

**1 Peter 3:17** - For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

**1 Peter 4:1** - Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, (Forewarned is forearmed!)

**1 Peter 4:16** - but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.

**1 Peter 5:14** - Peace be to you all who are in Christ. (assurance that peace is found IN CHRIST)

## **A READER BEING PERSECUTED**

This was most likely at the beginning of Neronian persecution. It was a time when the hearts of men were tried, when faith needed to be strengthened and Christ should become dearer to them than life itself. To give these believers this consolation and encouragement, Peter wrote them this Epistle. The storm of persecution was breaking about them and for many decades mighty Rome was to exert her power and adopt every measure in the attempt to exterminate Christianity by putting to death the followers of Christ. Would they suffer martyrdom rather than renounce their Lord, or would they deny Him rather than suffer torture and death, were vital questions in that day of the early church.

Passages: 1:6,7; 2:20; 3:13, 14, 17; 4:1, 4, 12, 14, 16