

Book of 1 Peter

Title:

The letter has always been identified (as are most general epistles, like James, John and Jude), with the name of the author, Peter.

And with the notation that it was his first inspired letter.

Author – Date:

The opening verse of the epistle claims it was written by Peter, who was clearly the leader among Christ's apostles.

The gospel writers emphasize this fact by placing his name at the head of each list of apostles (Matt. chapter 10; Mark chapter 3; Luke chapter 6; Acts chapter 1), and including more information about him in the 4 gospels than any person other than Christ.

Originally known as Simon (Greek), or Simeon (Hebrew); compare (Mark 1:16; John 1:40-41).

Peter was the son of Jonas (Matt. 16:17), who was also known as John (John 1:42), and a member of a family of fishermen who lived in Bethsaida and later Capernaum.

Andrew, Peter's brother, brought him to Christ (John 1:40-42).

He was married, and his wife apparently accompanied him in his ministry (see Mark 1:29-31; and 1 Corinthians 9:5).

Peter was a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee, when he was called to follow Jesus.

His brother, Andrew, was a fisherman, as well.

Peter was married and had a home in Capernaum.

When Jesus called Peter, he left his nets and followed Jesus.

Peter was called to follow Christ in His early ministry (Mark 1:16-17), and was later appointed to apostleship (Matt. 10:2; Mark 3:14-16).

Christ renamed him Peter (Greek), or Cephas (Aramaic), both words meaning "stone" or "rock" (John 1:42).

The Lord clearly singled out Peter for special lessons throughout the gospels (e.g. Matt. Chapter 10; 16:13-21; 17:1-9; 24:1-7; 26:31-33; John 6:6; 21:3-7; 15-17).

He was the spokesman for the 12, articulating their thoughts and questions as well as his own.

His triumphs and weaknesses are chronicled (in the gospels and Acts chapters 1-12).

There are many outstanding things about Peter.

This is the same Peter, who was chosen with James and John to carry out special tasks for the Lord Jesus.

This is the same Peter, who walked on the water.

He is the same Peter, who saw the transfiguration.

He is the same Peter, who told Jesus who He was, when people were guessing who Jesus was.

He said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Because of his unique prominence, there was no shortage in the early church of documents falsely claiming to be written by Peter.

That the Apostle Peter is the author of 1 Peter however, is certain.

The material in this letters bears definite resemblance to his messages in the book of Acts.

The letter teaches, for example, that Christ is the Stone rejected by the builder (2:7-8; Acts 4:10-11), and that Christ is no respecter of persons (1:17; Acts 10:34).

Peter teaches his readers to "clothe yourselves with humility" (5:5), an echo of the Lord's girding Himself with a towel and washing the disciples' feet (John 13:3-5).

There are other statements in the letter similar to Christ's sayings (4:14; 5:7-8).

Moreover, the author claims to have been a witness of the sufferings of Christ (5:1; compare 3:18; 4:1).

In addition to these internal evidences, it is noteworthy that the early Christians universally recognized this letter as the work of Peter.

The only significant doubt to be raised about Peter's authorship arises from the rather classical style of Greek employed in the letter.

Some have argued that Peter, being an “uneducated” fisherman (Acts 4:13), could not have written in sophisticated Greek, especially in light of the less classical style of Greek (employed in the writing of 2 Peter).

However, this argument is not without a good answer.

In the first place, that Peter was “uneducated” does not mean that he was illiterate, but only that he was without formal, rabbinical training in the Scriptures.

Moreover, though Aramaic may have been Peter’s primary language, Greek would have been a widely spoken second language in Palestine.

It is also apparent that at least some of the authors of the New Testament, though not highly educated, could read the Greek of the Old Testament Septuagint (see James’ use of the LXX in Acts 15:14-18).

Beyond these evidences of Peter’s ability in Greek, Peter also explained (5:12), that he wrote this letter “through Silvanus”, also known as Silas.

Silvanus was likely the messenger designated to take this letter to its intended readers.

But more is implied by this statement in that Peter is acknowledging that Silvanus served as his secretary, or amanuensis.

Dictation was common in the ancient Roman world (compare Paul and Tertius; Romans 16:22), and secretaries often could aid with syntax and grammar.

So Peter, under the superintendence of the Spirit of God, dictated the letter to Silvanus, while Silvanus, who also was a prophet (Acts 15:32), may have aided in some of the composition of the more classical Greek.

1 Peter was most likely written just before or shortly after July, A.D. 64 when the city of Rome burned, thus a writing date of ca. A.D. 64-65.

Background – Setting:

When the city of Rome burned, the Romans believed that their emperor, Nero, had set the city on fire, probably because of his incredible lust to build.

In order to build more, he had to destroy what already existed.

The Romans were totally devastated.

Their culture, in a sense, went down with the city.

All the religious elements of their life were destroyed, their great temples, shrines, and even their household idols were burned up.

This had great religious implications because it made them believe that their deities had been unable to deal with this conflagration and were also victims of it.

The people were homeless and hopeless.

Many had been killed.

Their bitter resentment was severe, so Nero realized that he had to redirect the hostility.

The emperor's chosen scapegoat was the Christians, who were already hated because they were associated with Jews, and because they were seen as being hostile to the Roman culture.

Nero spread the word quickly that the Christians had set the fires.

Thus, a vicious persecution against Christians began and soon spread throughout the Roman empire, touching places north of the Taurus mountains, like Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia (1:1), and impacted the Christians, who Peter call "aliens".

These "aliens", who were probably Gentiles, for the most part (1:14, 18; 2:9-10; 4:3), possibly led to Christ by Paul and his associates, and established on Paul's teachings, needed spiritual strengthening because of their sufferings.

Thus the Apostle Peter, who was under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote this epistle to strengthen them.

Peter wrote that he was in "Babylon" when he penned the letter (5:13).

Three locations have been suggested for this "Babylon".

First, a Roman outpost in northern Egypt was named Babylon; but the place was too obscure, and there are no reasons to think that Peter was ever there.

Second, ancient Babylon in Mesopotamia is a possibility; but it would be quite unlikely that Peter, Mark and Silvanus were all at this rather small, distant place at the same time.

Third, "Babylon" is an alias for Rome; perhaps even a code word of Rome.

In times of persecution, the writers exercised unusual care not to endanger Christians by identifying them.

Peter, according to some traditions, followed James and Paul and died as a martyr near Rome about two years after he wrote this letter, thus he had written this epistle near the end of his life, probably while staying in the imperial city.

He did not want the letter to be found and the church to be persecuted, so he may have hidden its location under the code word, Babylon”, which aptly fit because of the city’s idolatry (compare Rev. chapters 17-18).

Historical – Theological Themes:

This is one of the penman that we all relate to better than to most.

Peter was actually two men.

Peter, before the baptism of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and Peter after the baptism.

The Peter, before the baptism of the Holy Ghost denied Jesus as the Christ 3 times.

The Peter after the baptism, historians tell us, was pleased to be crucified like his Lord.

We can relate the weakness in all of us to Peter’s weakness and restoration.

Since the believers addressed were suffering escalating persecution (1:6; 2:12, 19-21; 3:9, 13-18; 4:1, 12-16, 19), the purpose of this letter was to teach them how to live victoriously in the midst of that hostility:

- (1) Without losing hope;
- (2) Without becoming bitter;
- (3) While trusting in their Lord; and
- (4) While looking for His second coming.

Peter wished to impress on his readers that by living an obedient, victorious life under duress, a Christian can actually evangelize his hostile world (1:14; 2:1, 12, 15; 3:1-6, 13-17; 4:2; 5:8-9).

Believers are constantly exposed to a world system energized by Satan and his demons.

Their effort is to discredit the church and to destroy its credibility and integrity.

One way these spirits work is by finding Christians whose lives are not consistent with the Word of God, and then parading them before the unbelievers to show what a sham the church is.

Christians, however, must stand against the enemy and silence the critics by the power of living holy lives.

In this epistle, Peter is rather effusive in reciting two categories of truth.

The first category is positive and includes a long list of blessings bestowed on Christians.

As he speaks about the identity of Christians and what it means to know Christ, Peter mentions one privilege and blessing after another.

Interwoven into this list of privileges is the catalog of suffering.

Christians, though most greatly privileged, should also know that all of the world will treat them very unjustly.

Their citizenship is in heaven and they are strangers in a hostile, Satan-energized world.

Thus the Christian life can then be summed up as a call to victory and glory through the path of their suffering.

So, the basic question that Peter answers in this epistle is: How are Christians supposed to deal with animosity?

The answer features practical truths and focuses on Jesus Christ as the model of one who maintained a triumphant attitude in the midst of hostility.

1 Peter also answers other important practical questions about Christian living such as: Do Christians need a priesthood to intercede with God for them (2:5-9)?

What should be the Christian's attitude to secular government and civil disobedience (2:13-17)?

What should a Christian employee's attitude be toward a hostile employer (2:18)?

How should a Christian lady conduct herself (3:3-4)?

How can a believing wife win her unsaved husband to Christ (3:1-2)?

Jesus chose Peter to head His church.

Jesus said, in Matthew 16:18 "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Peter saw most of the miracles Jesus did.

Peter's mother-in-law had been healed by Jesus.

Peter was there when John the Baptist called Jesus the Lamb of God.

Peter had been an eye-witness of the Lord.