

INTRODUCTION TO I PETER

Message #1

Various Texts

We are living in perilous times. These are times when God's people need stability and hope and encouragement. Living life is not easy and living the Christian life is not getting any easier either. God's people at times hurt. God's people lose jobs, lose health, lose pensions, lose relationships and lose life. When these kinds of things happen, it is tough to be a good ambassador for Christ. It is tough to live a godly life that makes an impact on others, when you are just trying to survive yourself. There is a New Testament book written to encourage Christians who are experiencing difficult times and things. There is a book written to promote such stability in a believer's life that he actually joyfully reflects the grace of God even though he is in emotional conflict and turmoil. Unfortunately, in the Church Age, ever since the Reformation, this book has been somewhat neglected in order to focus on the writings of John and Paul. Scot McKnight, who has taught the Greek text of this book for years, said he has never had any believer in the United States ever say this was their favorite book of the Bible (*I Peter*, p. 35). **This remarkable, life changing, hope giving book is the book of I Peter.** In the next weeks, we would like to take you on a journey through it.

QUESTION #1 – Why study the book of I Peter?

Reason #1 - Because I Peter is a book in the Bible.

What this means is that I Peter is one of only 66 books inspired by God. Every N.T. book had its own mysterious textual history. Each letter or book was written and circulated independently and therefore each had its own unique background. The text of I Peter is very reliable. The earliest manuscript of I Peter is the Bodmer Papyrus p72 of the third century. In existence, there are 3 papyri manuscripts, 16 uncial (large case Greek letters) manuscripts and 550 miniscule (small case Greek letters) manuscripts which have been preserved. Furthermore, there are a number of lectionaries (early church service books used for worship). I Peter was classified as being an inspired book of God by the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325-40), Hippo (A.D. 393), Carthage (A.D. 397 and 419). Early Church Fathers such as Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, Jerome and Augustine all classified this book as being inspired by God. Polycarp, the student of the Apostle John, quoted from I Peter as did Justin Martyr. Clearly, based on this preserved objective evidence, it is safe to conclude that I Peter is an inspired book of God. That is why we study it. In fact, this is the primary reason we do study it. When I read a book I expect it to affect me. When I read one of God's books, I expect it to transform me, to challenge me and change me. I Peter will do that for each of us.

Reason #2 - Because I Peter is a book written to encourage and challenge believers who are hurting.

Truth is, as believers, we do hurt. We do struggle. We do suffer. We do cry. There are times it appears as though believers who love God are on the losing side, not the winning side. That is why a book like I Peter is so important. It gives us hope and motivation to live for God. It is possible to suffer and still witness and glorify God.

D. Edmund Hiebert said, “First Peter is preeminently an epistle of triumphant faith amid suffering” (*I Peter*, p. 1). It exhorts us to endure the hardships and live as priestly victors who reflect God’s grace to the world. Robert G. Gromacki said I Peter challenges us to suffer patiently (**2:20**); for the sake of righteousness (**3:14**); for doing right (**3:17**); with rejoicing (**4:13**); as a Christian (**4:16**) and according to the will of God (**4:19**) (*New Testament Survey*, pp. 362-353). **The amazing thing that Peter will do to help get the believers out of their rut is to get them to focus their attention on deep truth about God.**

I Peter is no psychobabble counseling book, it is a book of deep theology that will bring believers strength, courage, encouragement and hope. In fact, it will bring believers to the place where suffering makes some sense and to the place where there actually can be joy in it. I. Howard Marshall said he could build a case that if one were to be shipwrecked on a desert island and allowed to have only one of the New Testament letters, then I Peter would be the ideal choice. It is rich, it is warm, it is comforting in hostile environments (I Howard Marshall, *I Peter*, p. 12).

Reason #3 - Because I Peter is a book that shows the potential transformation of a person who has a relationship with Jesus Christ and gets serious about the Word of God.

When Peter first met Jesus Christ, he was nothing more than a tough, rugged, worldly man. He was uneducated, emotional, unstable and sinful. He ran a fishing business with his brother Andrew, who was eventually responsible for bringing Peter to Jesus Christ (John 1:40-42). He was apparently a big strong man, who could single-handedly pull a huge net of fish out of the water (John 21:11) and single-handedly lift the dead weight of a lame man (Acts 3:6-7). He was what the world would call a “man’s man.” He liked to party, to drink and pursue things immoral and idolatrous (**I Peter 4:3**). However, by the time he writes I Peter, he is a rock solid, stable man in his faith and he has become a deep theologian. In fact, this former fisherman would end up holding a prominent place among the Apostles (Galatians 2:9). This uneducated learner has become a scholarly teacher. This book of I Peter deals with some very heavy doctrines. J. Vernon McGee said in just a few verses “you just couldn’t have any more doctrine crowded in” (J. Vernon McGee, *The First Epistle of Peter*, Vol. 5, p. 672).

What this tells us is that it is possible for a person to dramatically change and truly be transformed in character and mind. This book also tells us that a relationship with Jesus Christ that is truly blossoming will be one that goes after depth in God’s Word and doctrines. It is absolutely true, deep theology makes one stable when undergoing the pressures of life. Peter’s theology is deep. He was no longer some simpleminded fisherman. Just a cursory look at some of his doctrine clearly proves this. For example:

1. His theology was Trinitarian - Right at the outset in **verse 2**, he focuses on the work of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
2. Believers were born again by the elective power and grace and foreknowledge of God. **1:3-4**
3. Believers in the N.T. are just as much the people of God as believers in the O.T. **2:9-10**
4. Peter was able to understand the pictures of saving grace out of the O.T., specifically as those pictures related to Jesus Christ. **1:9-11**

5. Peter sees the connection between a believer's conduct and his ability to evangelize. **2:13; 3:1, 15-16** - The conduct is critical in times of suffering and the assumption of Peter is that believers will suffer, in this world because they are related to Jesus Christ.
6. Peter has a high regard for the Church of God. **2:4-7** - he elevated every believer to priest status.
7. Peter develops the doctrine of the suffering of the believer. This world is cruel to Christians and there will be times when the believer will suffer. Christ suffered in this world and so will those connected to Him. During these times we have the privilege of reflecting God's Grace with the knowledge that we are laying up treasures in heaven. There are two ways the believer may suffer in this world - by the will of God (**3:17**) and by the sinfulness of self (**4:14-16**). Peter did not want Christians looking to suffer, but taught them how to cope when they do.
8. Peter knew of angels, demons, and the devil and he also knew the key to victory - resist. **5:8**
9. Peter has a deep Church Age grasp of the Spirit's work - Sanctification (**1:2**), Baptism (**1:12 / 3:21**).
10. Peter develops the doctrine that we live in the world, but we are also aliens and strangers just passing through (**2:11**). We are to live in such a way as to reflect the grace and glory of God. We are to live in such a way that people ask us about our relationship with Jesus Christ - **I Peter 3:15**.

All of these doctrines came from a man who had been transformed by God's grace. There is no doubt that it is this doctrinal stability that enables Peter and us to cope with suffering and trouble. **This type of doctrine so transformed Peter's life that he went from being a man who literally denied Christ three times, into becoming a man who would lay down his life for his faith.** History says that Peter eventually went to Rome and was martyred by Nero (*Meyer's Commentary on the New Testament*, Vol. 10, p. 171). The doctrine of this epistle shows what Peter believed and why he believed it and this is the doctrine that changed him. If this doctrine can change a man like Peter, it can certainly change us.

QUESTION #2 – Who wrote I Peter?

I Peter was written by the Apostle Peter and as D. Edmond Hiebert said, the early Church had "no doubts" about it (*An Introduction to the New Testament*, Vol. 3, p. 105). There are two lines of proof that clearly establish that I Peter was written by the Apostle Peter.

Line of Proof #1 - The External line of proof.

There is no doubt that the early church clearly believed I Peter was written by the Apostle Peter. In fact, there is no evidence that any body ever doubted this. Eusebius the church historian said that it was written by "the apostle," referring to Peter. Papias quoted from I Peter and said it was a quote from Peter. Irenaeus (A.D. 180) said that Peter was the author of the epistle as did Tertullian (A.D. 200-206). Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150-200) wrote a commentary on I Peter and said it was Peter who wrote.

Line of Proof #2 - The Internal line of proof.

Verse 1 says Peter the apostle wrote it. In fact, when all is said and done and studied on this issue, you are still left with **I Peter 1:1**. There are other proofs as well. In **I Peter 5:1** the writer says he was an eyewitness of the sufferings of Christ, which fits Peter. In **I Peter 5:13**, the writer says he has a very close relationship with Mark that also fits Peter. There are many similarities between the teachings of Jesus and I Peter, indicating the writer spent time with Jesus (Luke 12:35 / I Peter 1:13; Luke 11:2 / I Peter 1:17; Matthew 5:16 / I Peter 2:12; Luke 6:28 / I Peter 3:9). Also there are similarities between Peter's speeches in Acts and material in I Peter (Acts 5:30; 10:39 / I Peter 2:24). If one is going to say the Apostle Peter did not write I Peter, then the burden of proof for a counterproof, falls to the one making the claim for the clear evidence is Peter wrote it.

It really wasn't until the 1700-1800s that any questioned this reality. It was F.C. Baur (1762-1860) who first put doubts in people's minds concerning this. There were about six arguments brought forward to deny that the Apostle Peter wrote I Peter:

- 1) The Greek is too good for Peter, an untrained, uneducated Galilean Jewish fisherman.
Greek was a common language and Peter knew it from boyhood. Furthermore, he had been a businessman in Galilee which was known to be a Gentile area. He knew and spoke Koine Greek fluently. Also, Peter used Silvanus (Silas) to help in writing it as his scribe or secretary (I Peter 5:12).
- 2) The O.T. quotes are from the Septuagint and a Galilean fisherman like Peter couldn't have known this.
The Greek speaking world, including the Jewish world, often used the Septuagint. Jesus, Himself, quoted out of the Septuagint. It was often used in Peter's day.
- 3) I Peter is too Pauline in doctrine.
There is no doubt that I Peter is filled with Pauline words and concepts. It has been observed that there are excerpts from both Romans and Ephesians. What we must remember is Paul writes Church Age doctrine and naturally any writing inspired by God for the Church Age will contain similar doctrine. All teaching for the Grace Age will conform to "sound" doctrine and teaching. Church theology is God's truth so there will be consistency to it, no matter who writes it. Furthermore Peter uses these doctrines to make his own point, not Paul's point (i.e. I Peter 4:1 / Romans 6:7). Plus Silas, Silvanus, is helping Peter write this and he also helped Paul (Acts 15:23, 40; 16:1-8; II Corinthians 1:19; I Thessalonians 1:1; II Thessalonians 1:1).
- 4) The Holy Spirit is referred to meagerly.
The Holy Spirit is mentioned several times in I Peter (1:2, 11, 12; 4:14). Also in many of Paul's writings, he does not mention much pertaining to the Holy Spirit and his authorship is not attacked because of it - i.e. Colossians, II Thessalonians.
- 5) There seems to be a lack of personal reminiscing about his own life as it relates to Jesus and His teachings.
First of all that is not true. One writer cites 32 passages in I Peter that are directly linked to Jesus Christ. Peter's purpose is not to reflect on his life with Jesus Christ, but to comfort and strengthen a suffering and hurting Church, Christ's body.

- 6) Persecution is apparently underway, making the writing later than when Peter lived.
Suffering for the name of Jesus Christ was known right from the beginning of the Church. In fact, Peter experienced it himself - Acts 4:13, 21. Furthermore, Nero was on the verge of turning against Christians and Peter knew it.

None of the liberal arguments stand - **I Peter was written by the Apostle Peter.**

QUESTION #3 – When did the Apostle Peter write I Peter?

The best answer to this question is that Peter wrote I Peter somewhere near A.D. 64, just prior to Nero's persecution of the Church. It is very possible from Peter's allusion to "fiery ordeal" (4:12) that Rome had just recently burned and Peter sensed Nero was going to turn against Christians. The A.D. 64-65 date certainly fits this time frame.

It would appear that the organized Roman persecution of Christians by Nero had not yet broke out. During the days of the early church, there were three main sources or forms of persecution against Christians. The chronological order was:

- 1) The first form of persecution the early church faced was religious persecution from religious leaders, specifically Jewish religious leaders. **I Peter 1:1** - initial scattering by religious men
- 2) The second form of persecution was the social persecution that came from living in a pagan world. **I Peter 2:12**
- 3) The third form of persecution was the government sanctioned persecution, authorized from various emperors of Rome (i.e. Nero, Domitian).

When one carefully studies I Peter, one certainly sees evidence of the first two forms of trials and sufferings but not necessarily the third form. In fact, it appears that government was functioning in somewhat of a decent way (**I Peter 2:13-14, 17**). We conclude that I Peter is written at a date late enough for the first two forms of persecution, but at a date just prior to Nero persecuting Christians. We conclude the most logical date is somewhere near A.D. 64.

QUESTION #4 – To whom did the Apostle Peter write I Peter?

I Peter 1:1 says that he was writing to the chosen who were scattered and were now living in Turkey. There is no evidence that Peter ever visited any of the places he names in **verse 1**. There is no question that he is writing to Christians (4:17), but the question among Bible scholars is "were they primarily Jewish Christians or Gentile Christians?" Naturally, since there is neither Jew nor Gentile in Christ, we may theologically conclude that this book is applicable to both Jewish and Gentile believers. **In fact, this book is classified as a General or Catholic or Universal Epistle because it does not specifically single out any church or group.**

However, Eusebius, the famed church historian of the 4th century says Peter was writing specifically to scattered Jewish believers. Eusebius based this on his view that Peter was the apostle to the Jews. However, as Dr. Hart, in his Greek Testament said, the internal evidence suggests otherwise (*The First Epistle General of Peter*, p. 7).

We certainly are able to observe that the language appears to be more of an emphasis on Gentile believers (**1:14, 18; 2:9-10, 25; 3:6**), who had never seen Jesus Christ (**1:8**), who originally were not considered to be the people of God, like Israel, who had stumbled over the message of Jesus Christ (**2:8, 10**). Peter specifically refers to Gentiles (**2:12; 4:3**). Furthermore, the former lifestyle Peter describes fits more the heathen, Gentile world than the strict Jewish religious world (**4:3-4**). Also the link that women have with Sarah comes through conversion, not physical birth (**3:6**). Based on these internal observations, **we think that I Peter was primarily written for Gentile Christians.**

The places named in **verse 1**, were mostly Pauline places and churches. Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles who often reached out to Jews and Peter was the apostle to the Jews (Galatians 2:7) who was now reaching out to Gentiles. Perhaps that confrontation with Paul in Galatians 2:11 turned him around to the point where he got more focused on reaching the Gentile world. This would be important for the Gentile believers to know that the premier Jewish apostle cared about them and considered them important to the work of God. So Peter, the apostle to the Jews, takes the time to write an epistle for the non-Jews.

QUESTION #5 – Where was Peter when he wrote I Peter?

According to **I Peter 5:13** the text says he was in “Babylon.” Bible scholars have argued over whether or not this refers to: **1)** A small town named Babylon in Egypt; **2)** The literal Babylon, located on the Euphrates (modern day Iraq) or **3)** A metaphorical and cryptical reference to Rome. This interpretation is favored by the Roman Catholics, who claim Peter was writing from Rome. Certainly Rome did have an idolatrous Babylonian existence.

In favor of the literal Babylon on the Euphrates:

- 1) Literal interpretation of the name Babylon would refer to the literal city on the Euphrates.
- 2) No hint that Peter would insert a symbolic name into a non-symbolic context.
- 3) Magi from this area came to visit Jesus by following a star (Matthew 2:1-2).
- 4) Many from Babylon (Mesopotamia) heard Peter speak in Jerusalem at Pentecost (Acts 2:9)
- 5) Peter is direct bold personality. If he meant Rome he would have said it and not try to hide it.
- 6) Babylon became a chief center for the Jewish Christians and it is logical that Peter the apostle to the Jews probably traveled to this Babylon to visit them and teach them. Meyer says there was a large Jewish community in Babylon and Peter, very probably, could have gone there to instruct those Jewish people (Vol. 10, p. 189).
- 7) The order of places listed in **I Peter 1:1** moves more logically from Babylon to Rome - the places for a loop that basically run from north (Pontus) to east (Galatia, Cappadocia), to southwest (Asia) and to the northwest (Bithynia). This moves first away from Rome toward Babylon, not toward Rome.

The biggest argument against literal Babylon seems to be that no historical data describes Peter ever going to Babylon. But that does not prove anything. No historical data describes Paul going to Spain and yet it is believed he did (Romans 15:28).

We stick with the literal, **Peter is writing I Peter from Babylon, which is modern day Iraq.**

QUESTION #6 – What is the theme of I Peter?

Lewis Sperry Chafer's eldest brother Rollin Chafer calls the argument of a Biblical book its scope or design and by giving attention to the book's design, it helps in interpreting the individual parts (cited from James Slaughter, *The Importance of Literary Argument for Understanding I Peter*, Bib. Sac, 152:605, p. 73). The passages in I Peter are not independent sections. They form a whole. If you overlook this, you cannot interpret a text and book accurately. Biblical writers did not sit down to share spiritual thoughts; they are writing God's inspired Word.

The Apostle Peter actually gives us his own reason for writing. Near the end of I Peter, we get a general purpose statement in that Peter wrote to get the believers to **“stand firm in the true grace of God” (I Peter 5:12)**. This theme of God's grace shows up at least eight times in I Peter, including three times in the first chapter: **1:2, 10, 13; 3:7; 4:10; 5:5, 10, 12**.

There are also certain other words that occur several times in I Peter. For example, the word “behavior” occurs five times in the book (**1:15; 2:12; 3:1, 2, 16**). The word “lusts” occurs some five times (**1:14; 2:11; 4:2, 3**). There is also a reoccurring emphasis on Christ's example (**2:21; 3:17-18; 4:1, 13; 5:3**). **However the word that occurs the most is the word “suffer” (1:11; 2:19, 20, 21, 23; 3:14, 17; 4:1 (twice), 13, 15, 19; 5:1, 9, 10)**. There are actually two different Greek words used for suffering, which tells us there are different kinds of suffering at different levels. The first word *pascw* occurs 12 times and is used in reference to the experience and the misfortune of suffering. The second word *paqhma* is used 4 times and emphasizes being subject to the passion of suffering. The first word has to do with the physical process and the second has to do with the emotional strain. Both words indicate the suffering acts on the person and is not self-induced. **Most suffering in I Peter does not originate with the believer but with the non-believer.** Unfair treatment coming from the hands of those unreasonable and unsaved is often presented.

Suffering is a critical theme of this book. All Grace Age believers can expect in some ways they will suffer (**5:9**) - slanderously, socially or satanically. As Dr. Wiersbe said “a comfortable Christian is a compromising Christian” (*Be Hopeful*, p. 5). **Suffering, in the Grace Age, is common to all believers, however not all suffering brings glory to God.** One may suffer for doing wrong and that certainly does not bring glory to God. However in some ways all believers will suffer.

What should a believer do who is suffering? How should we live as aliens in this world that treats us so bad? How do we demonstrate God's grace when we are hurting? Should we isolate ourselves? Should we withdraw from society? Should we treat unbelievers with a cold shoulder? Should we live our lives in a way that is obnoxious? Should we form vigilante groups or organize massive picket and protest groups? I Peter is a book designed to instruct us on this very point.

I Peter develops a theology that teaches us how to bide our time while on earth. It is a book that focuses so much on the grace of God and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that it is possible to get into the mindset in which we not only patiently endure suffering, but actually rejoices in it (**3:9; 4:13**). There are many future benefits from staying faithful through suffering (**1:6-7;**

2:19-20; 3:14; 4:14). Dr. Scroggie said “The Epistle is intended to comfort and strengthen believers in the sufferings to which they were exposed and to assure them of final triumph” (William Graham Scroggie, *The Unfolding Drama of Redemption*, Vol. 2, p. 303).

We believe the primary point of I Peter is this:

God wants His elected people who have experienced His Redemptive Grace to keep their mind focused on His Word and to become a joyful reflection of His grace through their holy lifestyle and verbal witness no matter what they are experiencing, and those who live this way will be greatly used by God in this world and will be greatly and abundantly honored in heaven.

I Peter gives us the theological and doctrinal information that makes this hope and testimony and lifestyle possible.

QUESTION #7 – What is the outline of I Peter?

I Peter breaks down nicely into three parts:

- 1) The theology needed to reflect God’s Grace in a way that is eternally honored. **1:1-2:10**
- 2) The practicality needed to reflect God’s Grace in a way that is eternally honored. **2:11-3:12**
- 3) The hostility needed to reflect God’s Grace in a way that is eternally honored. **3:13-5:11**

Get ready to go and get ready to grow. Get ready to be encouraged and challenged. Get ready to have hope. I Peter is about to enter our lives and is about to change our lives.

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