

Peter and his Epistles

Lesson 5: Introduction to 1 Peter

I. General Introduction

A. A word about general epistles:

There are seven New Testament Books in this category: James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2 & 3 John and Jude. They are so designated because of their universal scope (not written just to a single church).

B. Historical situation – Nero (Roman Emperor) was persecuting the church. Rome was burned in AD 64. Nero committed suicide in AD 68. Likely this letter was written from Rome (“Babylon”) some time between those two dates.

It was a time of great suffering for all believers. “In the most of all their discouragement, the sovereign God will keep them and enable them by faith to have joy. Jesus Christ by his patient suffering and glorious future destiny has given them the pattern to follow and also a living hope. Life in the pagan society is difficult and requires humility and submission.” (Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Vol. 12, p. 213)

It is a letter meant to bring hope to Christians who were experiencing “sharp opposition and persecution because of their faith” (1:6, 3:13-17, 4:12-19).

“While there are no hints of actual martyrdom or bloodshed, or even of imprisonment or confiscation of their goods, they were being subjected to “fiery trial” (4:12). The persecutions were in the form of vile slander and calumnious attacks upon them because they were Christians (4:14, 15). They were being hated and suspected because of their withdrawal from the licentious practices and amusements of their pagan neighbors (4:4,5). Apparently there also were charges of disloyalty to the state (2:13-17).” (An Introduction to the Non-Pauline Epistles, p. 121).

C. Place of origin

1. 5:13: “She who is Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark.”
2. There are three possible interpretations regarding the meaning of Babylon:
 - a. A city in Egypt
 - b. Babylon on the Euphrates
 - c. A cryptic designation for Rome

- d. “There is no tradition that Peter went to Babylon, and in his day it had few inhabitants. On the other hand, tradition consistently indicates that Peter spent the last years of his life in Rome. As a center of idolatry, the term “Babylon” was an appropriate figurative designation for Rome (cf. the later use of Babylon in Rev. 17-18). Peter used other figurative expressions in this epistle, and it is not surprising that he would do the same in Rome. His mention of Mark (5:13) also fits this view because Mark was in Rome during Paul’s first imprisonment (Col. 4:10).”

(Talk thru the Bible, p. 471)

D. Tradition has Peter dying in Rome in A.D. 68, so the letter was probably written in mid 60’s.

II. The Author – Peter with the assistance of Silas (5:12)

A. External evidence supports this claim

“(a) Clement of Rome, writing *ca.* A.D. 95 echoes the language of 1 Peter. (Lightfoot counts twelve parallelisms and Harnack twenty). Barnabas and Hermas also seem to have known 1 Peter.

(b) Polycarp, who died *ca.* A.D. 155, is steeped in the language of 1 Peter.

(c) Irenaeus, who wrote *ca.* A.D. 185, testifies, “Peter says in his epistle, ‘Whom though you see him not, etc.’”

(d) Eusebius, the father of church history, who classified the sacred writings as “accepted,” “disputed,” and “spurious,” placed 1 Peter in the first category.”

(Interpreter’s Bible, p. 77-78)

B. Internal evidence concurs

1. The flowing Greek (difficult for an uneducated fisherman) may well have been from Silas “...the voice may well be Peter’s voice though the literary hand is the hand of Silas.”

Silas

- Prominent member of Jerusalem Church (Acts 15)
- Sent to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas
- Accompanied Paul on his second missionary trip
- Was a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37)
- Called Silvanus in 2 Cor. 1:19, 1 Thes. 1:1, 2 Thes. 1:1
- Luke calls him Silas in Acts 15:45-18:5

C. The author clearly understood the teaching of Jesus. Look at these reflections:

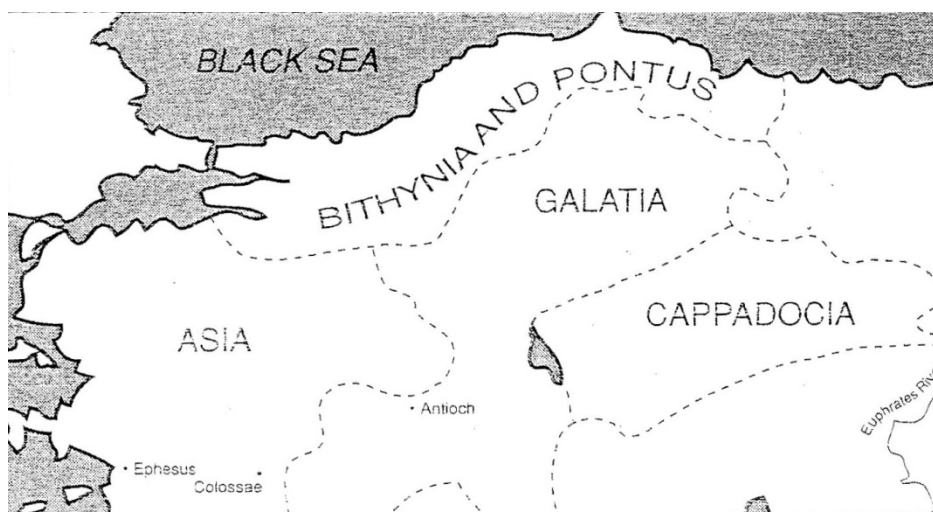
1 Peter	Ethical Teaching of Jesus
1:13 Therefore gird up your minds.	Luke 12:35 Let your loins be girded.
1:17 If you invoke as Father, etc.	Luke 11:2 When you pray, say: Father, etc.
2:12 That...they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.	Matt. 5:16 That they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.
3:9 Do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling; but on the contrary bless.	Luke 6:28 Bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.
3:14 If you do suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed.	Matt. 5:10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.
4:5 The will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.	Matt. 12:36 I tell you, on the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter.
4:14 If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed.	Matt. 5:11 Blessed are you when men revile you...on my account.
5:6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that in due time he may exalt you.	Luke 14:11 He who humbles himself will be exalted.
5:7 Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you.	Matt. 6:25 ff Do not be anxious about your life...Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

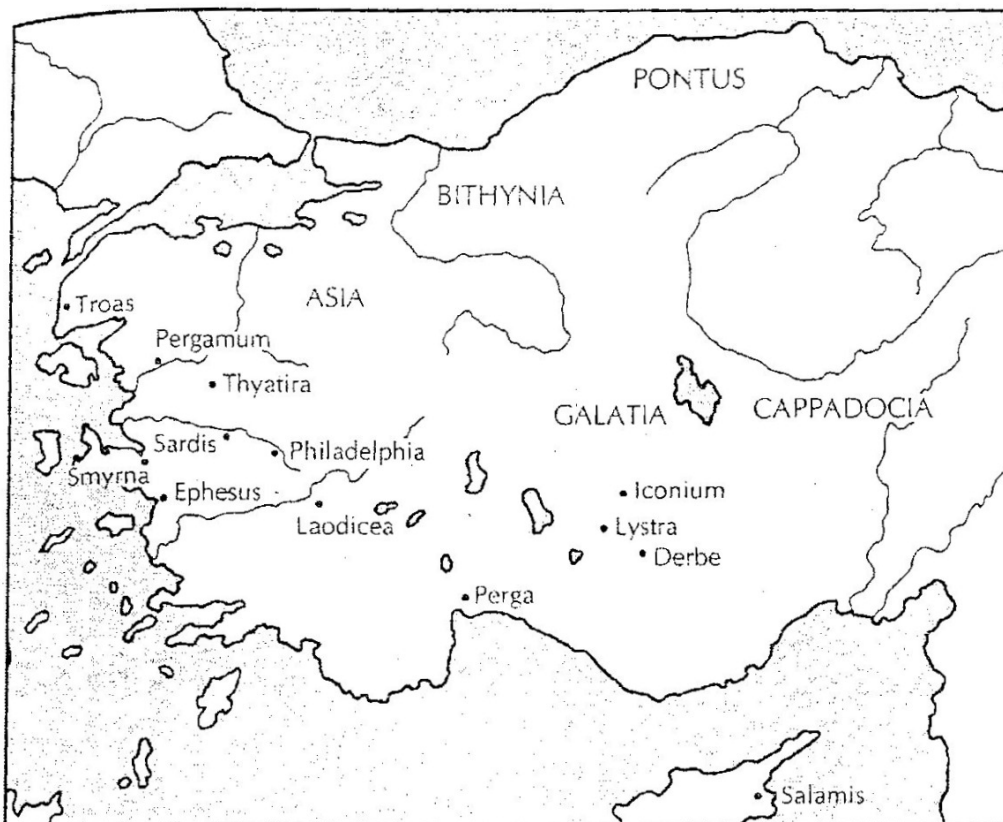
(Interpreter's Bible, p. 83)

NOTE: Peter is mentioned over 160 times in the New Testament

III. The Audience

A. This was a circular letter written to believers (primarily Gentiles) living in Asia Minor (modern Turkey). He mentions: Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia. All of these are Roman Provinces.





1. Pontus – situated along the Black Sea. Aquila came from here (Acts 18:2).
 2. Galatia – a central area addresses by Paul in his letter to the Galatians.
 3. Cappadocia – East of Galatia – a frontier Roman province. Jews from Cappadocia were in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:9).
 4. Asia – its capital was Ephesus. The seven churches in Rev. 2-3 were all in Asia.
 5. Bithynia – also along the Black Sea – Paul and Silas tried to visit on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:7).
- B. “Elect” (1:2)
1. According to the foreknowledge of God the Father – God knew who they were and where they were from.
 2. Through the sanctification of the Spirit – the Spirit “implants in us the divine nature, nurtures us, nourishes us, teaches us the potential of our life in Christ, and gives us the power to live that life.” (Exploring the Epistles of Peter, p. 31)
 3. According to the sprinkling of the Blood of Jesus Christ – mentioned also in Heb. 12:12-24. Peter has in mind the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16) where the high priest went through some 36 steps in order to secure a ritual cleansing of the Hebrew people. Christ accomplished it “once for all.” (Heb. 10:10)

C. Jews or Gentiles

1. Greek fathers thought he was addressing Jews. Latin (Roman) fathers thought he was speaking to Gentiles.
2. Pagan converts – mostly the fruit of Paul’s ministry (See 1:4, 18, 2:9, 4:2-4)

IV. Relationship to the rest of the scriptures

- A. Peter quotes a number of passages from the Old Testament, particularly Isaiah (1:24, 2:6, 8, 22, 40:6-8, 28:16, 8:14, 53:9). There are also a number of allusions to Old Testament stories and ideas.
- B. Peter seems very familiar with Paul’s writings. Compare:
 1. 1 Peter 1:3 with Eph. 1:3
 2. 1 Peter 1:20 with Eph 1:4
 3. Note his instructions to slaves, husbands and wives and Paul’s in Eph. Chap. 5-6
- C. There are parallels to Hebrews, James and certainly to Peter’s sermons in Acts (Acts 1-3)

V. So what?

- A. Notice that Peter uses the name/title “Jesus Christ” four times in the first 13 verses. Consider Matt. 16:16
 - B. When suffering (of any kind) occurs our total focus goes to that situation (we ask “Why me? Why now? Why this?”) When our focus is on Christ, we have a better perspective. Eyes on Christ (as the Lord), first!
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Discussion Questions

1. Are there any similarities between our world and Peter’s world? What are they?
2. How does focusing on Him (not the circumstances at hand) “change” things?