



1 Peter

1 Peter is often called the most hope-filled book of the New Testament. The theme that runs all the way through it is the theme of how to live with firm foundations in a hostile environment. The answer it gives is that the power of the gospel – new life and identity in Christ – is what provides the firmest of foundations that will help people to withstand great pressure. It also offers a vision of how to live such a lifestyle that those around – while not ceasing their hostility – might get a vision of who God is.



How long will it take?

Reading time: 16 mins
Short of time? Just read 1.1-13; 2.1-12; 3.1-9



Genre

Epistle



Anything tricky?

The passage 1.3-13 isn't so much tricky as deep, profound theology (in a single sentence) – it takes some digesting!

Some will also find the command in chapter 3 to women to obey their husbands to be challenging.



Inspiring quotes

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

(1 Peter 1.3)

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

(1 Peter 2.9-10)

Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.

(1 Peter 3.14b-16a)



About the Author

1 Peter 1.1 states that the author of the epistle was Peter an apostle of Jesus Christ, which has been taken to mean 'the' Peter of the Gospels.

There are many scholars, however, who do not believe that the author was, in fact, Peter. Some make the argument on the grounds that the author was well versed in Greek philosophy and rhetoric (and Peter couldn't have been); others argue that the persecution referred to in the epistle was probably from a later date (maybe as late as ad 80s-90s); others again that 1 Peter shares many themes with Ephesians and so may have been written after that epistle (and therefore after Peter had been martyred in Rome).

Other scholars find themselves unconvinced by these arguments and continue to attribute it to Peter.

What do we know about him?

Peter is the best known of all of Jesus' original 12 disciples. Although the other gospels say nothing of his ancestry or place of birth, John's

Gospel identified him as the son of John and from Bethsaida (John 1. 40-44). By the time he met Jesus in Mark's Gospel he appears to be living in Capernaum – or at least his mother-in-law was (Mark 1.30). He had a brother called Andrew (see Matthew 4.18 and John 1.40, 44). The gospels all identify Peter as a fisherman (hence the assumption by some that he would not have been trained in Greek philosophy or rhetoric).

Peter is presented in all four gospels as being very close to Jesus – even though he regularly got things wrong, a tendency that led in the end to him denying Jesus three times just before his trial. Christian tradition states that Peter was the first Bishop of Rome and was crucified there during the reign of the Emperor Nero (in the mid-60s ad). It is also held by some that the Gospel of Mark contains Peter's eyewitness testimony of the life and death of Jesus.

If the epistle was not written by Peter we know nothing of the author at all.



About the times

If the epistle was by Peter it would need to have been written before his death in the mid-60s ad (so sometime in the late 50s to early 60s ad). If not it might have been written as late as the 80s or 90s ad.

What were people feeling?

The audience of the letter is clear. The recipients of the epistle are identified in 1.1 as the 'exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia'. The Dispersion (or diaspora) is the name that is often used to describe the scattering of the Jews across the known world after the exile but most scholars think that the recipients of this letter were Gentiles. In other words, Peter was comparing the experience of this audience of Christians to the experience of the Jews.

As we read on we see that the Christians were struggling to survive in a hostile context, trying to live out their faith amongst those who despised them. The analogy, then, was designed to encourage them to persevere through the hardship.



What kind of Book is it?

An epistle or letter – 1 Peter reads more like a sermon than a straight letter, it is designed to be encouraging and uplifting.



How is it structured?

1.1-2	Greeting
1.3-12	Praise for what God has done in Jesus
1.13-2.3	Being God's holy people
2.4-10	Jesus the cornerstone
2.11-4.11	How to live faithfully in a hostile environment
4.12-5.11	Words of exhortation and hope
5.12-14	Closing words



Look out for...

The theme of suffering and persecution can be found running throughout the whole book, look out for it as you read and ask what message Peter is trying to communicate to a people struggling in a hostile environment.

Alongside suffering is the theme of 'hope'. What do you think the word hope means for Peter? Do we use it in the same way today?

Another strong theme of the book is relationship – with Christ and with each other – notice it when it comes and ask yourself what we might learn today from its message.



What could this mean for me?

On more than one occasion 1 Peter talks about conducting yourself 'honourably'. In other words your lifestyle is a vital part of Christian existence. What do you think an honourable Christian life should look like?



Discussion group questions

- Were there any parts of the book that you particularly liked or which inspired you?
- Were there any parts of the book that you disliked or which troubled you?
- What did you think the book was about?
- Hope is important all the way through the book. What do you, together, think Peter means by hope? How does it help the people in the midst of their suffering? Is there anything for us to learn today about hope in our lives?
- Peter is talking in the book about living faithfully in a hostile world – while recognizing that there are others who live in a far more hostile world than we do – is there anything you learnt while you read that might help us live more faithfully today in a society that regards us as, at best, mad and at worst, much worse than that?
- Discuss 1 Peter 3.1-4. It's controversial so don't hold back. Why do you think it says what it does? Do you agree? Disagree? Is there anything in it that is helpful?
- Did you read anything in the book that touched you, expanded your faith or made you think more deeply about your life and how you live it?



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