

1 Peter

Dr. Charles “Buddy” Parrish
July 29, 2020



1 Peter – An Introduction

Type of Epistle

- 1 Peter is different from most other New Testament epistles because of its target audience. For example, all of Paul's letters, if we exclude Hebrews, were written to specific people (Timothy) or churches (Philippians). 1 Peter, like James, is written to a much broader audience. This epistle is addressed to followers of Jesus throughout "Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia", a territory that covers what is now central and northern Turkey.
- Scholars then have referred to 1 Peter as a **General** or **catholic** (universal) epistle. Between the first century when the church began and the fourth century when the Bible was set, canonized, there were a good number of letters/epistles that were likewise addressed to broad audiences. Written by some of the early church fathers, these epistles, like 1 Peter, came to be accepted as authoritative by the whole church. What sets 1 Peter apart is the authorship.

Authorship

- 1 Peter is written from a pastor's heart. It is one of the easiest books of the Bible to read. It is a source of eternal encouragement. All of these qualities point to the authorship of the epistle.
- The very first verse identifies the author as "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ". No one throughout history ever questioned that the author was the impetuous fisherman from Capernaum whom Jesus named "Peter, the Rock". No one that is until liberal scholasticism began invading the seminaries a little over 100 years ago. These scholars seemed to be determined to nitpick the Bible to pieces and by so doing undermine its authority. When they got to 1 Peter, they immediately dismissed Peter as the

author because the writing is too good. In point of fact, the Greek in 1 Peter is very, very good. Far too good they argued for a simple Galilean fisherman to have written it. Moreover, they objected not only to the quality of the writing, but also to the quality of the mind that put together a letter so well organized and with a theology so deep.

- There are some very solid reasons why they are wrong. First is their academic snobbery. To say that a fisherman from Galilee could not have written it is like saying that Thomas Wolfe could not have written his great books because he grew up in the North Carolina mountains in the early 1900's. Peter did have a pretty good teacher for 3 years and 30 years or more after that to continue to learn and find ways to put into language all that he knew of Jesus. But the letter itself offers the explanation as to how a letter from a Galilean fisherman could have been written as well as if written by Aeschylus himself. The key is in 1 Peter 5:12 where we are told, "Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard him), I have written to you briefly...". So like Paul often did, Peter had a secretary transcribing his spoken words to paper. And Silvanus? Paul says Silvanus was with him and Timothy preaching to the Corinthians during the second missionary journey (2 Cor. 1:19), that Silvanus was with Paul and Timothy when Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians (1 Thess. 1:1) and again when he wrote 2 Thessalonians (2 Thess. 1:1), both letters being written from Corinth back to the Thessalonians during the second missionary journey. What this further means is that the Silvanus of the epistles is also the Silas of Acts, who accompanied Paul on the second missionary journey, Silas being a shortened and more common version of Silvanus (think Robert to Rob or even Bobby, William to Will, etc.). Acts 15:32 tells us the early church considered him a prophet and was a chief among the brethren at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15: 22, 27). When at the outset of the second missionary journey Paul and Barnabas split over the question of John Mark, Paul chose Silas, a Greek Jew like himself, to go with him (Acts 15:40). In Acts 16:37 we are told that like Paul, Silas was also a Roman citizen. So here is a fellow who Paul so highly values that he chose him as his missionary partner; who was a leader in the Jerusalem church where he surely knew Peter; who was Roman citizen; who was recognized for his spiritual power by being

labeled a prophet, and who clearly was highly educated and wrote better than even the great Paul himself! How blessed Christ's church has been throughout the centuries to have servants like Silvanus who are not only highly gifted in the ways the world might value (education, wealth, etc.) but also highly gifted in the spiritual ways of the Kingdom of God!

Place of Origin and Date

- While some scholars still argue for a later date (90-112 AD?) and many of these and others argue for an author from the very places the letter is written to, the widely accepted view is that 1 Peter was written by the Apostle Peter **in Rome** shortly after the great fire of Rome when Nero was emperor, giving us a date of around **67 AD**. That the churches to whom the letter is addressed are undergoing persecution is a key theme of the letter. Nero used the Christian church as his scapegoat for the fire, while even in that time most everyone knew it was Nero who was responsible, but how do you challenge him? And if you want to be on his good side, if Nero says to persecute this group or that group for their crimes against the state, then that's what you do, whether in Rome or on the eastern edge of the empire.
- 5:13 says "She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark". We know well from our recent study of the Revelation how the early church used feminine pronouns when referring to the church and used Babylon as a code name for Rome. And all of this sets up very well with what tradition has always held: that Peter was martyred in Rome around this same time on Nero's order and that Mark wrote his gospel in Rome around this same time as well and used Peter as his primary source, which is why there is no Christmas story in Mark's gospel, but a great deal of emphasis on the death, resurrection, and second coming of Christ.

Recipients of the letter

- As previously stated, the areas mentioned in the address are in what is now northern and central Turkey. It seems that these were mostly Gentile churches. The Apostle calls himself Peter, his Greek name, not his Hebrew name, Simon, nor the Hebrew equivalent of Peter, Cephas, as Paul does in 1 Cor. 15. Nor is there any discussion of the Law, nor the church debate between the Law and Grace as was common in churches with large Jewish membership.
- Further, these people were undergoing something they had not experienced before (in the age of COVID-19 we should understand this somewhat). Rome had not previously been a threat to the church in any way. Indeed, it was Rome who protected Paul from the Jews time and again. But all that forever changed with Nero. The persecution that began under Nero was unlike anything even the Romans had witnessed before. Roman writers such as Tacitus, who were not Christian and had no particular sympathy for the church, were appalled at the way Christians were being slaughtered, “for it was not for the public good, it seemed, but to satisfy one man’s cruelty that they were being destroyed.”
- So how do you hold a church together in the midst of a crisis you’ve never experienced before? This is what Peter is addressing. This is why Peter is writing. Paul had started some of the churches in the areas to which the letter is written, but he did not start all of them. Perhaps on his journey toward Rome, Peter had been guided to the churches in the region. It is hard to estimate the rock star quality Peter would have had in the hearts and minds of the people of these churches. So he writes as a shepherd to his flock, as a pastor to his church.