

A LOOK AT THE BOOK 1 PETER

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AUTHOR AND DATE

The letter claims to have been written by the apostle Peter.

This internal claim is confirmed by tradition.

While the date is uncertain, it was probably written near the end of Peter's ministry, shortly before his death in A.D. 68. It may have been written about A.D. 65.

BACKGROUND

The letter was directed to saints scattered through Asia Minor.

Peter's reference to the dispersion and his emphasis on ministry to Jews would seem to indicate that the letter was written to Jews.

However, the description of their former life seems to argue for Gentile origins (2:19-12; 4:3).

Neither argument is conclusive, since either view can be defended reasonably.

Perhaps the best solution is to acknowledge the obvious, that these are scattered saints, and to leave open the two interpretive alternatives.

Clearly Peter has written the letter to saints who are suffering because of their faith.

Years have passed since James wrote.

The same conditions continue.

Those who are suffering need encouragement.

PURPOSE AND THEME

Two key sets of words, or concepts, are repeated frequently throughout the book: "suffer" and "glory".

The repetition and interrelationship of these two ideas point to the theme of 1 Peter.

The book shows the relationship between the present suffering and the future glory in which we will participate in the future.

The main idea is that God uses suffering to prepare us for greater glory.

His purpose is to encourage us to remain faithful to God and to maintain a good testimony.

In the end, God will be glorified and we will participate in His victory.

ORGANIZATION

The body of the letter develops around the main idea:

- 1) First, Peter describes the hope which enables God's children to be victorious in the midst of suffering (1:3-2:10).
- 2) Second, he calls them to maintain a good testimony in the midst of suffering (2:11-4:11).
- 3) Finally, the proper attitude and conduct in the midst of suffering are discussed (4:12-5:11).

The three main points are enclosed by the formal introduction to the letter (1:1-2) and personal notes at the end (5:12-14).

THE HOPE WHICH CONQUERS IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING 1:3-2:10

INTRODUCTION 1:1-2

The introduction to the letter includes the normal three parts: author, recipient and greeting 1:1-2

The description of the recipients emphasizes God's plan.

Both the suffering and the glory to follow are based on God's plan.

They are the results of God's election.

PRESENTATION OF OUR HOPE 1:3-5

Peter begins the development of his argument by presenting the hope which will enable these scattered Christians to triumph in the midst of the severe suffering which lies ahead (1:3-2:10).

He first describes that hope.

While most people would despair in the face of such great affliction, God's children have cause to rejoice.

As a result of the new birth, we have a living hope (1:3).

Our hope lives because it is based on Christ's completed work, rather than our own.

It has been guaranteed by the resurrection of Christ.

Our hope is reinforced because it promises an inheritance which cannot be damaged nor taken away from us (1:4-5).

This is not an earthly possession which persecutors can strip from us.

It is protected by God's own power.

PURPOSE OF OUR SUFFERING 1:6-9

Although we have a great hope for the future, the present reality must be dealt with.

The immediate future will still bring suffering.

It is possible to rejoice while suffering because we understand the purpose for suffering.

Suffering will prove the genuineness of our faith and produce praise to God.

PROBLEM OF THE PROPHETS 1:10-12

The concept of suffering to obtain glory was never understood by the prophets.

When they saw the teachings concerning Christ's suffering and those concerning His glory, they tried to figure it all out, but it remained a mystery to them.

Nevertheless, both aspects of His life were predicted.

PRACTICE OF OUR HOPE 1:13-2:10

On the basis of these two realities, how should God's children live?

What practical results should our hope produce in the midst of suffering?

Proper attitudes 1:13

Peter first describes the attitudes which God's children should have in the midst of suffering.

Ready for battle 1:13a

We should prepare ourselves for battle.

All obstacles should be removed just as the soldier tied his tunic up with his belt so that it would not hinder him in battle.

Discernment 1:13b

Secondly, we should view our suffering from God's point of view.

Hope 1:13c

Finally, we should have an expectant attitude, consciously concentrating on God's grace and on Christ's coming, rather than on our present sufferings.

These three attitudes will deliver us from despair in the presence of affliction.

Proper actions 1:14-2:10

Proper attitudes will produce proper conduct.

He describes the lifestyle which ought to characterize those who have this hope in the midst of suffering.

Holiness 1:14-16

We should be holy, just as God Himself is holy.

Reverence 1:17-21

Aware of God's role as judge of all men and of the high price Christ paid to redeem us, we should live our lives in reverent fear before Him.

Love 1:22-25

Because of the common bond produced by the new birth, we should demonstrate a sincere, profound love for our brethren.

Such love is not natural among men but is produced by God's enduring Word.

Desire for God's Word 2:1-3

The reference to God's Word suggests the fourth characteristic of those who have this hope while suffering.

Just as babies desire milk, we ought to have a natural craving for God's Word.

Peter demonstrates the intimate relationship which exists between the demonstration of love and the Word of God.

God's Word will cause us to avoid those loveless acts which mark the natural man.

Identification with Christ and His people 2:4-10

Finally, Peter indicates the fifth characteristic of those who have this hope.

We are to be identified with Christ and with one another.

God is building us into one building and one people.

We should recognize our unity with the rest of God's people and help one another.

We have all come to the same rock.

We are all suffering.

Therefore, we should work together as God intended.

THE CALL TO A GOOD TESTIMONY IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING 2:11-4:11

The main principle the book presents is that the Christian hope should make a difference in our lives, even when suffering.

Peter now emphasizes this principle by calling on the reader to maintain a good testimony, even if it causes us to suffer.

IMPORTANCE OF GOOD DEEDS 2:11-12

An initial summary statement emphasizes the importance of good deeds.

Foreigners living temporarily in another country should not become involved in the affairs of that country.

We are temporary residents of this world.

Our permanent home and citizenship is in heaven.

Therefore, we ought not to act like the citizens of this world act.

We are different from them (2:11).

An additional reason for maintaining that distinction is that the sinful desires which characterize this world are futile.

In the end they will cause destruction.

Besides the negative aspect of separation from the lifestyle of the world just mentioned, there is also a positive motivation.

We ought to do what is right so that even those who oppose us will be able to see our godly lifestyle and glorify Him (2:12).

IMPORTANCE OF SUBMISSION 2:13-3:7

Peter is specifically interested in the testimony of God's people before recognized authorities.

In a world characterized by rebellion and lack of respect for authority, it is hard to submit to authority when those in command abuse their privileges.

Nevertheless, it is precisely that submission to authority in the midst of persecution that will demonstrate that we are suffering on account of God and not for evil deeds.

Therefore, three areas of authority are defined and submission to the authority which God has established enjoined.

Submission to government 2:13-17

The first sphere of authority Peter defines is that of government.

We are urged to do good and, if necessary, even suffer for doing what is right.

We should submit to authority and do good so we give no occasion for anyone to accuse us of rebellion.

Submission at work 2:18-25

The second sphere of authority is that of our work.

The most common pattern of that day was the servant/master relationship.

The servant should submit to his master, regardless of how the master may treat him.

Even if we suffer unjustly, we should submit.
(This is totally contrary to the world's philosophy).

Submission at home 3:1-7

The third sphere of authority described is that of the home.

Wives are to submit to their husbands.

Her inner beauty, demonstrated by a gentle, submissive spirit, may be sufficient to convince the unbelieving husband.

Husbands ought not to use this authority for selfish gain, nor abuse our wives.

Christian husbands ought to be characterized by consideration and respect for our wives.

SUFFERING FOR GOOD DEEDS 3:8-22

In each of these areas, those who share this hope in Christ should maintain a solid testimony and be willing to accept suffering, if necessary, for doing good.

Peter defines some of the good deeds which ought to characterize the lives of those who belong to God (3:8-13).

There should be harmony in our way of thinking, without divisions or discussions.

We should identify with those who suffer and seek to help them.

We should demonstrate brotherly love for one another.

We ought to show a profound concern for one another.

We should think humbly, considering others to be more important than ourselves.

Each of these deals with our support for one another as brothers (3:8).

Peter deals more specifically with our response to mistreatment, or the desire for vengeance (3:9-13).

Since we have been called to receive blessing, we ought to bless those who mistreat us, rather than curse them.

We should not attempt to repay those who harm us.

This exhortation may refer to both the unsaved, who want to destroy us, and to the saved, who in an attempt to protect themselves may betray us.

We ought not to seek evil against them, but rather good.

Of major importance for maintaining a good testimony in suffering is recognizing its value for doing good (3:14-22).

After establishing the principle (3:14-17), Peter uses Christ as his primary example (3:18-22).

Christ, the righteous One, suffered and died for the unrighteous, so that we might come to God.

Then God restored Him to life by His Spirit.

Christ's suffering was the source of blessing for many.

We too should be willing to suffer wrongly for the will of God.

Two parenthetical comments in this section have caused considerable confusion.

The first deals with Christ's preaching to the disobedient of Noah's time (3:19-20).

This appears to offer a second chance for salvation after death.

That idea contradicts the clear teaching of Hebrews 9:27 that man has only one chance and after that judgment follows.

Several details should be observed in the passage.

In 3:19, "through whom" indicates that Christ spoke to them in the Spirit.

The same expression is used in 1:11 to describe the prophet's message in the Old Testament.

The Spirit of Christ in the prophets spoke of His suffering.

Thus it can be shown that Peter recognized that Christ had spoken previously by the Spirit.

According to 3:20, those to whom He preached are those who disobeyed, that is, who refused to believe God, long ago.

The critical question, of course, is when He preached to them.

While the adverbial phrase concerning God's patience could describe the time of their disobedience, it might equally well modify the main verb of the sentence and thus refer to the act of preaching itself.

The meaning in this case would be that the patience of God was waiting while the Spirit of Christ in His messengers preached in the days of Noah.

The same time sequence is observed in 4:6: "*The gospel was preached even to those who are now dead.*"

The idea is supported by Peter's comparison of the same story in 2 Peter 3:3-10.

God again waits patiently while the Spirit of God preaches through His servants that men might repent (3:7-9).

The second parenthetical problem is the significance of Peter's reference to baptism: "*Baptism that now saves you also*" (3:21).

In what sense does baptism save us?

This verse must be understood in the light of more than 200 verses which mention faith as the only prerequisite for salvation.

For example, if baptism is a requirement for salvation, then Acts 16:31 is a deceptive answer to the question asked.

They have not told the whole truth.

The context supplies a better solution to the problem.

The key is the type of salvation which they received.

They were saved from immediate judgment, not from spiritual death.

If there is an immediate physical judgment about to fall which could affect them, this would provide a better explanation.

They are less than ten years before the destruction of Jerusalem.

God was about to judge the generation which had rejected Christ.

Peter had already preached that those who identified with Christ by baptism would be delivered from the judgment which was about to come on that generation (2:36-40).

The result is also significant.

Peter does not say that baptism removes their sin.

It does bring a clear conscience before God.

Noah, then, serves as another good example of those who suffer.

He was criticized and laughed at, yet he believed God and maintained a good testimony.

As a result he was saved from the effects of the approaching judgment of God.

They too can experience a similar condition.

If they identify with Christ and maintain a good testimony, they may suffer from the scoffers, but they will be delivered from the coming judgment.

SPECIFIC APPLICATION 4:1-11

Peter now makes a direct application to our lives, based on Christ's example.

Christ's example for us 4:1-2

Christ suffered in His physical body and, as a result, no longer has anything to do with sin.

We ought to follow His example.

We should be willing to suffer and we ought to live differently.

We ought not to live according to the lifestyle of the natural man, but rather, according to God's will.

Our example before the world 4:3-11

After stating the general principle, Peter goes on to explain specifically what a life that conforms to God's will is like.

From a negative viewpoint he demonstrates that we will not continue in the same way as other men (4:3-6).

We used to live that way.

Others still don't understand why we don't join them.

As a result, they will mistreat us.

In the end, however, they will have to account to God for their actions.

This is the reason the gospel was preached to those who have already died, that they might not only suffer persecution but might live spiritually in God's presence.

The positive lifestyle which conforms to God's will is also explained (4:7-11).

We ought to understand the things which are happening from God's point of view.

We should calm down and get control of ourselves so that we can pray concerning the things disturbing us.

We should love one another deeply.

The kind of love necessary is that which is willing to overlook the offenses of others who may mistreat or fail us in the midst of our suffering.

We ought to show hospitality to those who pass through and need our help, without complaining about it.

Finally, we ought to use the gifts God has given us to serve others, and ultimately, to glorify God.

THE CORRECT ATTITUDE AND CONDUCT IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING 4:12-5:11

Having completed the exhortation to maintain a good testimony even if it means suffering for doing good, Peter deals with the attitude we ought to have in the midst of our suffering (4:12-19) and some specific areas of conduct in the church (5:1-11)

PROPER ATTITUDE 4:12-19

Concerning our attitude in the midst of suffering, Peter wants us to realize that when we suffer unjustly, we identify with Christ who also suffered unjustly (4:12-14).

Therefore we ought not to be surprised or confused by our suffering.

We ought to rejoice that we are so identified with Him that others wish to persecute us.

We should be sure we don't suffer as a criminal or for any other kind of misconduct, but having assured that, we can praise God that we have been considered worthy to suffer for His name (4:15-16).

A proper attitude toward suffering will recognize it in relationship to the principles of God's judgment (4:17-19).

It is a biblical principle that God's judgment begins with His people and proceeds from them to others.

Our suffering serves to protect us, but it also serves as a guarantee that God will ultimately judge the others.

If God's own people suffer so much, how much greater will the suffering of the unjust be?

Therefore, we should remember all that God has done for us in the past and commit ourselves to Him.

We should continue to do good.

The others will have to account for themselves before God.

PROPER CONDUCT IN THE CHURCH 5:1-9

The suffering God's people are experiencing has implications for conduct within the church also.

For elders 5:1-4

Peter reminds the elders of the importance of their role of service to the church.

They are to function as shepherds, caring for the sheep in their time of need.

They ought not to serve because of obligation, but out of personal desire to serve God.

They ought not to work for personal gain, but to assist those who need their help.

They ought not to lead as rulers over their people, but as examples for the people to follow.

In this way their ministry will be effective and they will be appropriately rewarded.

For young men 5:5-9

The young men of the church, or perhaps those who do not serve as elders, ought to demonstrate a humble and submissive attitude.

They ought to submit to the authority God has established, rather than fight for personal recognition.

They should be cautious because the devil would like to use their affliction as an occasion to make them fall.

They should resist him, stand firm in the faith, and refuse to let discouragement defeat them.

Recognition of their identification with the entire body in its sufferings will encourage them.

CONCLUDING WISH FOR THEM 5:10-11

Peter's desire for us is summarized in the prayer that God will strengthen us, guide us through our temporary sufferings, and cause us to experience victory in the end.

PERSONAL MATTERS 5:12-14

He acknowledges the help of Silas as amanuensis (5:12).

This comment is probably written in his own handwriting to authenticate his authorship.

Words of greeting are sent (5:13).

"She who is in Babylon" is perhaps a hidden reference to the church in Rome.

Its meaning is not clear here, but it is not likely to be a reference to a contemporary literal city of Babylon.

The letter concludes with a closing wish that we might experience peace (5:14).