

• *A letter with the purpose of encouraging Christians in Roman Asia to live a godly life*

'1 Peter' is a letter written by the apostle Peter, maybe in the early AD 60s, with the purpose of encouraging Christians in Roman Asia to live a godly life. They were experiencing some sufferings and trials<sup>☐1</sup> and the sufferings were likely to get worse. The letter was written while Peter was in Rome. 'Babylon' in 5:13 is a reference to the capital city of the empire, which was known for its luxury, wealth and wickedness, like the ancient empire of Babylon.

☐1 see 1:6; 3:13-17; 4:12-19; 5:9

• *Sections*

The main sections of the letter are as follows:

- 1:1–2 Introduction
- 1:3–12 Thanksgiving: The Christian's Resources
- 1:13–2:12 Motivations to Holiness
- 2:13–4:11 Detailed Instructions
- 4:12–5:11 Christian Suffering
- 5:12–14 Conclusion

• *Peter introduces himself to his gentile readers*

In the opening lines, Peter introduces himself<sup>☐1</sup>, addresses himself to his readers<sup>☐2</sup> and gives his greeting<sup>☐3</sup>. The Christians in the Roman provinces mentioned in 1:1 were mainly Gentiles. The letter is a circular letter but Peter clearly knew the people well. Peter had once specially worked among Jews<sup>☐4</sup> but outside of Israel there were probably no totally Jewish congregations. It was mainly Gentiles who were accepting the gospel of Jesus. So Peter is now working among churches consisting mainly of Gentiles.

☐1 1:1a  
 ☐2 1:1b-2a  
 ☐3 1:2b  
 ☐4 Galatians 2:9

**1. Consider first of all the writer, the apostle Peter**

**1. Consider first of all the writer, the apostle Peter.** Peter's story is well-known. He was born and grew up in Galilee. His family came from Bethsaida but at some stage Peter moved to Capernaum. He first met Jesus while they were both visiting Jerusalem. Later Peter was chosen as one of Jesus' twelve apostles. Peter was married and his mother-in-law lived in Capernaum. Jesus used the home of Peter's mother-in-law as his base in Capernaum for much of his ministry in Galilee.

• *The natural leader*

Peter was the natural leader of the twelve apostles and, later, of the Jerusalem church, but he was also a man who could make some bad mistakes. He tended to make forward moves in faith only in impulsive steps.

• *Peter based in Rome after leaving Jerusalem*

After he had been leading the church in Jerusalem for some years, conflict with the Jerusalem authorities forced him to leave for 'another place'<sup>☐1</sup>. I agree with those who think 'another place' in Acts 12:17 may be Rome (but the author of Acts avoids saying it so precisely). Peter made Rome his headquarters for twenty-five years (AD 42–67) until he died in the days of the emperor Nero. But he certainly was not in Rome all the time. He travelled a lot, taking his wife with him<sup>☐2</sup> and visiting places like Corinth and Antioch, as well as the places in Asia Minor mentioned in verse 1.

☐1 Acts 12:17

☐2 1 Corinthians 9:5

• *Peter was an unexceptional man in his origins*

**Peter was an unexceptional man in his origins.** He did not come from a famous or rich family. He was not highly educated. God can transform the lives of quite ordinary people. Generally it is not the wealthy and high-born that God uses.

• Peter was a changed person

**Peter was a changed person.** He had come to experience salvation in Jesus. His life had undergone many changes since the time he first came to know Jesus. Now Peter the fisherman is Peter the apostle.

• Peter was a trained man

**Peter was a trained man.** Jesus had said 'Follow me and I will make you become a fisher of people'<sup>1</sup>. Jesus had kept His word. He had made Peter to become a man much used by God. Jesus had trained him.

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 4:19

• Peter was a stabilized man

**Peter was a stabilized man.** In his early days he had shown much instability. But the outpouring of the Spirit upon the day of Pentecost had given him greater steadiness in his life. He had had some ups and downs, but clearly was now being used in Roman Asia Minor and had become a recognized leader of the church.

• Peter was a called man

**Peter was a called man.** Jesus had powerfully brought him into doing the work of an apostle. God's calling had been at work in his life.

So he writes this letter. He says a little about himself; he is 'Peter an apostle'. But he says much more about his readers.

## 2. Consider Peter's readers

2. **Consider Peter's readers.** Peter addresses his Christian friends. '*Peter an apostle of Jesus Christ; to God's chosen ones, temporary residents of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia*<sup>1</sup>, chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctifying work of the Spirit, ready for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling with his blood. May grace and peace be given to you in increasing measure<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> 1:1

<sup>2</sup> 1:2

• The Bible's way of approaching holiness – begins by talking about who we are

In the way in which Peter addresses his friends he is telling them something about their position as God's people. This is the Bible's way of approaching the preaching of holiness. It begins by telling Christians who they are and what has happened to them. The world talks a lot about what we must do. The Bible also gives specific instructions, but it never begins with a list of what to do and what not to do. It begins by telling us who we are. Peter describes his readers in detail because he wants to underline certain things about them which will encourage them. He wants them to know that they are able to live a godly life.

• They are God's chosen ones

**They are God's chosen ones.** Literally translated, Peter's words are: 'To chosen temporary-residents of the Diaspora of Pontus...'. They are temporary residents of this world. 'Temporary-residents of the Diaspora...' is a phrase that was generally used of Jews. In the ancient world the 'Diaspora' (the 'scattering') of the Jews was well-known. Nebuchadnezzar exiled Jews to Babylon. There they were purified from their idolatry. After about seventy years it was possible for them to go back to Israel but most of them stayed scattered throughout the Persian empire and then throughout the Greek and Roman empires. Yet Peter is not referring to Jews; he is referring to Christians. God's newly restructured 'Israel' – all Christian believers – are scattered throughout the world as much as the ancient Jews were. Sometimes persecution scatters them, as happened in the early days of the church<sup>1</sup>. Every Christian is a 'temporary resident'. This world is not our home, although many Christians live in it as if they were here to stay forever.

<sup>1</sup> Acts 8:2

• They were the objects of God's special love

**They were the objects of God's special love.** He addresses them as 'God's chosen ones . . . people chosen according to the foreknowledge of God...'. God's 'knowledge' in a passage like this means God's love. God 'knows' everyone in one sense, but He 'knows' some people in a special way by His setting His love on them. 'Know' often means 'take into one's special care'. The point is not that what they would **do** was foreknown, or that their faith was foreknown. Rather it means that God had appointed a destiny for them because He had set His love upon them.

• They had experienced the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit

**They had experienced the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.** When Peter says they are 'people chosen according to the foreknowledge of God, in the sanctification of the Spirit...', he is referring to something that happened at their conversion. God's choice of them had shown itself 'in' the sanctifying work of the Spirit that took place at their conversion to Jesus. ('Sanctifying work' refers to what happened at conversion; see how the word is used in 1 Corinthians 6:11 and Hebrews 10:10).

• They had been prepared for obedience

**They had been prepared for obedience.** The sanctifying work of the Spirit prepares us for obedience to Jesus. That is what Christian godliness is. It is not simply respectability or ordinary morality. It is zealous obedience towards Jesus.

• Willingness to be obedient produces a clean and clear conscience

**Their willingness to be obedient produces in them a clean and clear conscience.** Peter adds another phrase: 'for... sprinkling with his blood'. This refers to the work of the blood of Jesus in making us feel clean. We get a conscience that feels good because we know we are forgiven and we know we are 'walking in the light'.

### 3. Consider their need

**3. Consider their needs.** Peter greets them<sup>1</sup>. His greatest longing for them is for a deeper experience of God's grace in their lives, and a deeper experience of God's peace.

<sup>1</sup> 1:2b



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