

Key Verse: 4:13

“But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.”

Author, Date and Place of Writing

Peter identifies himself as the author of this letter (1:1). He introduced himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ. He was Jesus' top disciple among the Twelve, whom Jesus appointed as apostles (Mk 3:14). In this letter, he refers to himself as an elder,¹ that is, a shepherd of God's flock (5:1-2). Furthermore, he calls himself a witness of Christ's sufferings, who also will share in his glory (5:1). A fisherman by trade, Peter was called by Jesus as his disciple with the promise, “I will make you fishers of men” (Mk 1:17). Jesus changed his name from Simon to Peter, which means “rock” (Mk 3:16; Jn 1:42). This signified Jesus' great hope for Peter to be a leader of his church (Mt 16:18). Peter was with Jesus for 3 ½ years during his earthly ministry. He came to know Jesus' divine character, saw his miracles, and heard his teachings until he could confess “You are the Christ” (Mk 8:29). He was with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mk 9:2-13), at the Last Supper (Mk 14:12-26), in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mk 12:32-42), at his arrest and trial (Mk 12:43-72), and at the empty tomb (Mk 16:1-8). He met the visible Risen Christ and was commissioned to preach the gospel to the whole world (Mk 16:14-18). He witnessed the ascension of Christ and heard the promise of his second coming (Mk 16:19-20; Ac 1:9).

Peter was a main figure in the establishment of the early church. He was present at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon the believers, and he stood up to preach the gospel powerfully in Jerusalem (Ac 2). While shepherding God's flock in Israel, he performed many miracles. He was led by the Holy Spirit to preach the gospel to a Gentile, Cornelius, and his household. This opened the door for Gentiles to enter the church. Still, Peter focused his ministry on the Jews in the earlier years (Gal 2:9). Later, when persecution against Christians worldwide arose, he went to Rome to care for God's suffering flock where he wrote this letter (5:13)², most likely in about A.D. 62-63. Some years later he wrote 2 Peter as well. Tradition says he was martyred by being crucified upside down in A.D. 67-68 during the time of Emperor Nero.

¹ The words “elder,” and “shepherd” or “pastor” (which come from the same Greek word “ποιμην” [poy-men]), were used interchangeably in the early church (Ac 20:17,28; Eph 4:11; 1 Ti 5:17).

² In 5:13, “She” likely refers to the church and “Babylon” may refer to Rome. (See also Rev. 16:19)

Peter mentions in this letter “Mark my son” (1 Pe 5:13). This refers to the gospel writer Mark, whose gospel reflects Peter’s eye witness account. The fact that Peter was an apostle of Christ, an elder, and an eye-witness of Christ’s suffering and glory establish the authority and authenticity of his letter.

Recipients

Peter is writing to “God’s elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia” (1:1; see map). These were Gentile areas. In his letter, Peter does not distinguish between Jews and Gentiles as Paul does. But the references to “those who are not God’s people” becoming “his people,” and to “doing what pagans choose to do” (1:14,18; 2:10; 4:3) indicates that his audience was primarily Gentile. At the time of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon the believers, people from Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, and Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism) were present (Ac 2:9-11). They heard the gospel message from Peter and carried it back to their homeland.

Peter also calls his audience “foreigners and exiles” (1:17; 2:11). Spiritually speaking, this refers to the heavenly citizenship of Christians, whose home is not in this world. However, Peter may literally refer to Jews who had migrated. After Stephen’s martyrdom, persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem. Believers were scattered, first to Judea and Samaria, and later they preached the gospel when they traveled to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch (Ac 8:1,4; 11:19-21). Antioch became a missionary-sending church (11:26; 13:2-14:26). In this way some Jewish believers had come to be scattered throughout Asia.

Galatia and Asia, mentioned by Peter, were visited by Paul during his missionary journeys. As Paul had preached the gospel, churches were planted in the Galatian cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, as well as in the Asian cities of Colossae, Laodicea, Hierapolis, and Ephesus. It is likely that Peter’s letter would have circulated among these churches as well.

Historical Background

Since Jesus’ death and resurrection, the gospel had spread around the Greco-Roman world for about 30 years. The book of Acts reveals that as the rays of gospel light began to shine into the darkness of the world, some people responded with faith and received eternal life, while others rejected the gospel and began to persecute believers. Persecution came from Jews who viewed the gospel as a threat to their religious system, which undermined their law and the temple worship (Ac

5:17-18; 6:9; 8:1; 13:48-52; 14:19; 18:28; 21:27-28). It also came from Gentiles whose lifestyle, value system, religious beliefs and philosophies—which promoted idolatry, immorality and love of money—were challenged by the gospel (Ac 16:19-21; 17:32; 19:23-31; 24:26). When Peter wrote this letter, even though there was no official, empire-wide persecution of Christians—like that which arose under Nero (A.D. 54-68), Domitian (A.D. 81-96), and Trajan (A.D. 98-117)—local persecution was common. Generally, the atmosphere was hostile to Christians (5:9; 2 Ti 3:12). Christians were rejected, marginalized, insulted, verbally abused, and even beaten (2:4,7,20-21; 4:4,14). They faced all kinds of trials and fiery ordeals (1:6; 4:12).

Purpose of Writing

Peter, as a shepherd, encouraged scattered believers—suffering all kinds of trials—in many ways: To have a living hope in the kingdom of God (1:3-4); To find the meaning of their sufferings and rejoice (1:6-9); To live a holy life, not conform to evil desires (1:14-16); To crave pure spiritual milk so that they may grow up in their salvation (2:2); To come to Jesus, the living Stone, so that they become living stones being built up as a spiritual house (2:5); To know their identity as a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and God's special possession so that they may declare the praises of him who called them out of darkness into his wonderful light (2:9); To suffer for doing good, following the example of Christ (2:12,19-25; 3:13-14,17-18); To set apart Christ as Lord in their hearts and to always be ready to answer those who asked about their hope (3:15); To rejoice to participate in the sufferings of Christ (4:13); To be shepherds of God's flock (5:2); To be alert and sober-minded, and to stand firm in the faith (4:4; 5:8-9). Though Peter said many things, his main point was for them to rejoice inasmuch as they participated in Christ's sufferings in the midst of their trials.

Characteristics

The work of the Triune God: Peter expresses the work of the triune God in salvation (2): God the Father chooses his children according to his foreknowledge; the Spirit sanctifies believers; Jesus Christ saves them by his blood and becomes Lord, the one they obey.

The Names of Christ: The names of Christ used by Peter in this book are quite distinctive. Peter calls Jesus “the living Stone” (2:4) and “the cornerstone” (2:6-7) for those who trust him, and “a stone of stumbling” or “a rock of offense” (ESV 2:8) for those who disobey the message. This reflects Peter's personal experience

with Christ. When Jesus called him, he gave him the name “Cephas,” or “Peter,” which means “rock” (Jn 1:42). After Peter confessed Jesus to be the Messiah, Jesus told him, “You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church” (Mt 16:18). Peter was present when Jesus identified himself with the cornerstone of Scripture (Mk 12:10-11). Jesus’ name “the living Stone” is especially unique, which implies that Jesus is the firm foundation of God’s house; he is immovable but full of life.

Peter also calls Jesus the Shepherd and Overseer (2:25), and the Chief Shepherd (5:4). Peter was shepherded by Jesus for 3 ½ years. He heard Jesus say, “I am the good shepherd” (Jn 10:11), and witnessed Jesus’ life-giving service for God’s flock who were like sheep without a shepherd (Mk 6:34). After his resurrection, Jesus visited his disciples and asked Peter, “Do you love me?” Then Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs...take care of my sheep...feed my sheep” (Jn 21:15-17). Jesus urged Peter to be a shepherd following his footsteps (Jn 21:19).

The Identity of Believers: Peter identified believers as God’s elect, chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and God’s special possession (1:1; 2:9). He borrowed these terms from the Old Testament, particularly Exodus 19:5-6. He saw the believers as the people of God (2:10). They were chosen by God through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit and redeemed by Jesus’ blood (1:2,18). It was not on the basis of human descent or human effort or human decision; but they were born of God through his living and enduring word (Jn 1:13; 1 Pe 1:23). The people of God are not defined in terms of nationality, race, social status or any other human distinctive, but by faith in Jesus (Gal 3:28). Their identity is in the person of Jesus Christ; it is not political or geographical, but spiritual in nature. In calling them a royal priesthood, Peter relates their identity to their mission. Their mission is to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God, to declare his praises to those living in darkness, and to share the hope of the gospel with the whole world (2:5,9; 3:15). In emphasizing their spiritual identity, Peter encourages them to not shrink back in the face of persecution, but to advance the gospel with confidence.

Peter also calls them “exiles” (1:1; 2:11) and “foreigners” (1:17; 2:11). They had been driven by persecution out of their homelands and were living as strangers in foreign lands. Nevertheless, they did not conform to the lifestyle and value system of the world (4:4); they lived holy lives (1:15). Their hope was not in the world, but in God and his kingdom (1:3,21; 3:5,15), as exiles and foreigners.

A Living Hope: Peter praises God who has given believers a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1:3). When they were scattered by persecution, they had lost many things in the world. They seemed to have no hope.

But Peter reminded them that they had a living hope in the kingdom of God. While the hopes in this world disappoint us because they are rooted in things that perish, spoil and fade, the living hope never disappoints us because it is everlasting. This hope enables us to persevere through all kinds of trials and to grow to be like Jesus. This hope encourages us to live a sacrificial life for his kingdom.

Be Holy: Peter emphasized that God's purpose of saving his people is to help them to grow in God's image and live a holy life in this world (1:15-16; 2:9). He exhorts them to abstain from sinful desires which wage war against their souls (1:14; 2:11). The purpose of being holy is not only for their personal growth, but to glorify God among the pagans (2:12).

The Living and Enduring Word of God: Peter reminded them that they had been purified by obeying the truth (1:22). Then he encouraged them to love one another deeply from their hearts. He gave them the reason: "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For, 'All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever'" (1:23-25). The word of God not only gives new birth, it is also the source of spiritual growth. So Peter exhorted them: "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation..." (2:2).

Doing Good versus Doing Evil: Peter repeats the words "doing good/right" or their equivalent, such as "good lives" "good deeds" "good behavior" many times in this letter (2:12[2],15,20; 3:11,13,16,17; 4:19). He also repeats "doing evil/wrong" many times (1:14; 2:12,14,16,20; 3:10,11,12,17; 4:2). Christians are called to live out their identity by doing good. A Christian's moral and ethical standard and conduct should be evident to all, and a testimony to the world. Often, however, doing good brings about suffering. Peter encourages them to suffer for doing good, not evil (2:19-20; 3:17).

Suffering and Glory: Peter repeated the word "suffering" or a variation of it 18 times (1:6,11; 2:19,20,21,23; 3:14,17,18; 4:1,1,13,15,16,19; 5:1,9,10) and the word "glory" or a variation of it 11 times (1:7,8,11,21,24; 4:11,13,14; 5:1,4,10). This is indeed a theme of his letter. Peter helped believers find the meaning of their suffering: it proves the genuineness of their faith, which results in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed (1:7). Furthermore, through suffering they can grow in knowing Christ by following his example and becoming more like him (2:21; 4:1,13). Peter reminded believers that Christ suffered for them to bring them salvation (2:24; 3:18). Also, he encouraged them to participate in Christ's suffering

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more positively by rejoicing in it (4:13). And he encouraged them to suffer for doing good (3:17), to suffer as Christians (4:16), and to suffer according to the will of God (4:19). Then the Spirit of glory and of God will rest on them (4:14b).

Submission: When Christians were suffering from all kinds of trials it was easy for them to become bitter and rebellious toward society. They were tempted to become fearful and withdraw to live in separation from the world. They were also vulnerable to spiritual elitism when they heard the words “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and God’s special possession.” So there was a danger for them to ignore human authorities. But Peter exhorted them to submit themselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority—in society, at home and in the church (2:13,18; 3:1; 5:5). Peter gave reasons for this, among which are: it glorifies God (2:12), it is God’s will (2:15), it is commendable before God (2:19,20b), it is following Jesus’ footsteps (2:21), it is the way to win over unbelievers (3:1), and it is the way to obtain God’s favor (5:5).

Teachings to Wives and Husbands: Peter’s teaching is unique in that he deals with believing wives being married to unbelieving husbands (3:1). He encouraged them to win their husbands over through submission—not with words, but by their inner beauty which comes from obedience to God (3:2-6). Peter also called on believing husbands to be considerate as they live with their wives, and to treat them with respect as weaker partners and as heirs of the gracious gift of life so that nothing will hinder their prayers (3:7).

Be Ready to Explain Your Hope: In 3:15 Peter urged believers to always be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asked them to give the reason for the hope that they had in Christ. Living a good life in the midst of persecution was not enough; they needed to be ready to give a clear reason for their hope so that unbelievers may be won over to Christ. This has become the inspiration for Christian apologetics.

Exhortation to Elders and Young People: Peter appealed to the elders to be shepherds of God’s flock willingly, not just as a duty (5:1-2). He urged them not to rule over God’s flock, but to be examples to them (5:3). And he reminded them that they would receive a crown of glory when the Chief Shepherd appears (4). Peter encouraged younger people to be submissive to their elders with the humility befitting the children of God. He exhorted all believers to clothe themselves with humility toward one another, because God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble (5:5-6).

Main Theme

Peter encouraged scattered believers, who were suffering for the sake of Christ, to find the meaning: they were being refined in genuine faith and growing in the character of Christ (1:7,9; 2:21). Furthermore, he exhorted them to rejoice as they participated in the suffering of Christ, promising that they would be overjoyed when Christ's glory is revealed (4:13). This exhortation amazes us when we remember what kind of person Peter had been. When Jesus first told the disciples that he must suffer, be rejected, killed, and rise again, Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked him (Mk 8:31-32). It was because his concept of the Messiah was contradictory, according to the prevalent idea of the time. People thought that the Messiah would remain forever without suffering and death, and establish an earthly Messianic kingdom like that of King David's time (Jn 12:34; Ac 1:6). This idea was advocated by the teachers of the law based on the prophecy of Malachi (Mal 4:5-6). They taught that Elijah would come first and restore all things and then the Messiah would come in glory (Mk 9:11-12a). They overlooked the Scriptures that prophesied the Messiah would be a suffering servant who would die as a ransom for sinners and rise again (Ps 22, 69; Isa 53).

However, Jesus clearly taught the Biblical concept of the Messiah in its fullness. He repeatedly taught his disciples that he must suffer, die and rise again (Mk 8:31, 9:12, 9:31, 10:33-34). Jesus taught the Jewish leaders that though he was rejected by humans like a rejected stone, he was chosen by God as the cornerstone (Mk 12:10-11; Ps 118:22-23; 1 Pe 2:4-7). After Jesus had risen from the dead, he continued to teach his disciples that the Messiah had to suffer and then enter his glory, as foretold by Moses and the prophets (Lk 24:26).

Even though Jesus taught the necessity of the Messiah's suffering and death in order to enter his glory, Peter resisted Jesus' teaching. Nevertheless, Jesus did not give up on Peter or compromise with him. At the Last Supper, Jesus washed Peter's dirty feet and foretold his denial (Jn 13:4-11,38). Jesus prayed for Peter that his faith may not fail, and encouraged him that after he turned back to Jesus, to strengthen his brothers (Lk 22:32). As Jesus foretold, Peter denied him three times during his passion. It was a complete failure as his disciple. Peter was humbled and broken, realizing that he was a terrible sinner. The Risen Jesus visited him and restored him with his unchanging love (Jn 21). Through this experience he could realize that Jesus bore his sins in his body on the cross; his wounds were healed so that he might die to sins and live for righteousness (1 Pe 2:24). At Pentecost, he was empowered by the Holy Spirit and delivered the gospel message: Jesus' suffering, death, resurrection, ascension and sovereign rule (Ac 2:22-35). He

declared: "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah" (Ac 2:36). Upon hearing his message, 3,000 people repented and accepted Jesus as their Messiah, and were added to the church (Ac 2:41). In this way, Peter fully accepted Jesus as the Messiah who suffered, died, rose again and entered his glory. He himself followed Jesus' example and exhorted believers to rejoice inasmuch as they participated in Christ's suffering.

Purpose of our Study

First, we want to learn to have a right view of suffering in Christ and to participate in it with joy, following Jesus' good example. Actually, nobody wants to suffer. When we hear the word "suffering" we tend to shrink back and try to avoid it as much as possible, thinking that suffering has no meaning and is even harmful. This makes people fearful and weak. However, anyone who lives a genuine life of faith in Christ will suffer at least to some degree (2 Ti 3:12). Peter teaches us that it is a meaningful part of our Christian life. Through suffering, Jesus wants us to grow in his likeness. Injustice, insults, persecution and misunderstanding are part of this process. Furthermore, suffering refines us so that we may have true hope in God's kingdom. God uses it for our good and for his salvation purpose. When we realize this, we can have a right attitude toward suffering. We can rejoice as we participate in the suffering of Christ, for we will also share in his glory.

Second, we want to learn our clear identity as God's chosen people and a royal priesthood (2:9). Having this clear identity helps us to stand firm and not shrink back from persecution or trial. Rather, we can declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light. We can share the reason for our hope with everyone who asks, and be used effectively to advance the kingdom of God (3:15).

Outline

I. Greetings (1:1-2)

II. Living Hope (1:3-12)

A. Praise God for what he has done for us (1:3-5)

B. The meaning of suffering in Jesus (1:6-9)

C. The prophets foretold the sufferings and glory of the Messiah (1:10-12)

III. Be holy (1:13-2:3)

- A. Be holy because God is holy (1:13-16)
- B. Live as foreigners in reverent fear (1:17-21)
- C. Love one another deeply (1:22-25)
- D. Crave pure spiritual milk (2:1-3)

IV. A royal priesthood (2:4-12)

- A. Jesus, the living Stone (2:4-8)
- B. A new identity (2:9-10)
- C. Live good lives among the pagans (2:11-12)

V. Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake (2:13-3:7)

- A. Submit to human authorities (2:13-17)
- B. Slaves submit to masters (2:18-20)
- C. Christ's suffering as an example and for our salvation (2:21-25)
- D. Relationship between wives and husbands (3:1-7)

VI. Suffering for doing good (3:8-22)

- A. Repay evil with blessing (3:8-12)
- B. Ready to give an answer for the reason of our hope (3:13-16)
- C. Christ's example of suffering for doing good and victory (3:17-22)

VII. Arm yourselves with Christ's attitude (mindset) (4:1-19)

- A. Live for the will of God (4:1-6)

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B. The end is near (4:7-11)

C. Rejoice to participate in Christ's suffering (4:12-19)

VIII. Be shepherds of God's flock (5:1-11)

A. Instructions to the Elders and the young (5:1-5a)

B. General instructions (5:5b-11)

IX. Final Greetings (5:12-14)

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