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MINISTRIES

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Bible Study: Life in Exile - Intro to 1 Peter (1 Peter 1:1-2)

The letter of 1 Peter teaches us about who we are in the Messiah and the hope we have in the midst of suffering. Peter wants us to know that if we are in Messiah, Israel’s story of redemption, mission, and hope has become our story too.

In this teaching series, we will be going through 1 Peter verse by verse. This letter is full of Old Testament allusions that give us insight and wisdom into our identity and mission as believers.

In this first teaching we will be going through kind of an introduction of the letter. We are going to talk about authorship, the original audience, and some of the broader themes of this letter. So, let’s go ahead and get started.

1 Peter 1:1-2

[Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ \[Messiah Yeshua\], To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ \[Messiah Yeshua\] and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.](#)

So, as we can see, the letter itself claims Peter as its author. Peter was one of the twelve disciples of Yeshua-Jesus the Messiah, and here, Peter is identified as an apostle. The basic meaning of “apostle” is a person who is sent on a mission as a representative. Peter was commissioned directly by Yeshua to take the Gospel to the nations.

Peter’s given name was Simon, or Shimon in Hebrew; and he met Yeshua through his brother Andrew, who was a disciple of John the Baptist (John 1:35, 40). Andrew came to believe in Yeshua when he heard John the Baptist proclaim Yeshua to be the Lamb of God (John 1:36-37).

When Andrew introduced his brother, Peter, to Yeshua, Yeshua gave him the name Cephas, “Peter,” which means “rock” (John 1:42). Peter was one rock who, along with Yeshua and the rest of the apostles, would be the foundation for the *ekklesia*, the “church,” which Yeshua promised to build (cf. Ephesians 2:20). Later, when Peter and Andrew were fishing, Yeshua came to them and said, “Follow

me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). And, of course, they immediately left their nets and at that moment became official disciples of Yeshua.

Of course, we know Peter wasn’t perfect. He made some pretty significant mistakes, like when he denied Yeshua after Yeshua was sentenced to death on charges of blasphemy. But Peter repented and he was restored by Messiah, who appeared to Peter first after his resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:5).

After Yeshua’s ascension, Peter’s commission was to proclaim the glorious truth of the risen Messiah to all nations. This calling required Peter to get over some unrighteous prejudices he held toward Gentiles. So, what happened was that God gave Peter a vision to teach him that he must not consider any person unclean or common (Acts 10:9-29). After this revelation, Peter began preaching to the Gentiles, and the Holy Spirit fell upon them, and they were baptized in Yeshua’s name (Acts 10:34-48). So a pretty incredible testimony of, God working through Peter in his ministry to the Gentiles.

However, some Jews criticized Peter for interacting with Gentiles (Acts 11:3), but Peter told them about all that had happened and said, “If God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Messiah Yeshua, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” He said that in Acts 11:17. So, Peter’s testimony silenced his critics and they agreed that God welcomed the Gentiles into the community of faith. So, God used Peter to open the gate, so-to-speak, for the Gospel to go forth to the Gentile world.

In accordance with Yeshua’s prophecy in John 21:18, Peter was eventually martyred via crucifixion. According to Eusebius, Peter demanded that he actually be crucified upside down so that his crucifixion would not be compared to Yeshua’s (*Church History* 3.1).

So, the words of this letter are important because they’re from someone who spent personal time with Yeshua during his earthly ministry, walking with him and ministering with him. Peter was a leader of the original “Messianic movement” that forever changed the world. What an incredible gift to have Peter’s teachings! We really have a lot to learn from him.

Authorship of 1 Peter

But before we go further, it’s worth our time to establish the authorship of this letter. Did Peter really write this letter? This is important because liberal scholars have recently argued that Peter was *not* the author of this letter. So let’s talk about that for a minute.

As we read earlier, the letter itself says that Peter is the author. If someone objects to what the letter says, they need to provide evidence that shows Peter couldn’t have been the author. Typically, there are two reasons given in support of rejecting Peter’s authorship. We’ll address those soon, but first, let’s discuss a few reasons we can trust the letter’s claim that Peter is the author.

First, the letter had a vast influence on early Christian writings and it was accepted as having been written by Peter from the earliest time it circulated among the Christian communities. For instance, Polycarp, a disciple of John, quotes from 1 Peter nine times in his letter to the Philippians, which is dated between 110-140 AD. Additionally, several other second-century Christian witnesses recognize the letter as having been authored by Peter. In the third century, Eusebius cites traditions from Clement of Alexandria and Origen that reference Peter as the author (*Church History* 2.15.2; 6.25.8). From as far back as we can go, the evidence indicates that the earliest Christians regarded 1 Peter as an authentic

epistle of Peter. The letter was circulated widely among Christians and accepted as genuine by pretty much *everyone* that we know of at the time. There was really no one that we know of that denied this.

Second, the author of 2 Peter, who claims to be Peter himself (2 Peter 1:1), refers to his letter as “the second letter that I am writing to you” in 2 Peter 3:1. So, 2 Peter is another early witness to the existence of a previous letter attributed to Peter. And even if you doubt the authenticity of 2 Peter, at the very least, it shows us that an earlier letter attributed to Peter was widely known at the time and regarded as genuine at the time 2 Peter was written.

A third point worth mentioning is that the content of 1 Peter matches his teachings in other writings, particularly the speeches attributed to him in the Book of Acts. Both writings contain the same themes: fulfillment of prophecy (Acts 2:16ff; 1 Peter 1:10), Messiah’s manifestation in the last days (Acts 2:17; 1 Peter 1:20), God’s fore-ordination of Yeshua’s death (Acts 2:23; 1 Peter 1:20), the connection between Messiah’s resurrection and his exaltation (Acts 2:32-36; 1 Peter 1:21), and so forth. We would expect these similarities if the Peter whose speeches are recorded in Acts were the same person who authored 1 Peter.

So, in summary, historical sources from 2 Peter to second and third-century Christian writings, confirm Peter’s authorship. Moreover, teachings attributed to Peter elsewhere in the Bible have similarities to the content of 1 Peter, which lends support to the assumption that the letter’s claim is correct and Peter was the author.

But what about the claim that Peter was *not* the author? Well, there are two reasons usually given to support this idea:

- 1) The Greek of the epistle is very polished and not what one would expect from an “uneducated” (Acts 4:13) Galilean fisherman whose native language was Aramaic.
- 2) The content of 1 Peter reflects a time much later than Peter’s lifetime. In particular, Peter references Christian persecution, but widespread persecution against Christians did not occur until much later.

Both of these objections to Peter’s authorship can be addressed rather easily.

Regarding the first one, the letter’s polished Greek is hardly a sufficient reason to doubt Peter’s authorship. First, Peter’s skills in Greek likely improved significantly throughout his teaching ministry to Greek-speaking audiences. Second, and more important, Peter could have hired a scribe to write the letter at his dictation—which was a very common practice at the time. Thus, the high quality of the Greek would be attributed to the scribe. Plus, Peter explicitly references the help of Silvanus (1 Peter 5:12), who was a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37). Most Jews in Rome spoke Greek and were well educated, and so Silvanus could have assisted Peter in improving his writing. All that to say, the letter’s polished Greek can be reasonably explained without discounting Peter’s authorship.

Regarding the second point, due to Peter’s references to persecution, scholars have attempted to date the letter to the reign of one of three Roman emperors: Nero (AD 54-68), Domitian (AD 81-96), or Trajan (AD 98-117). Most liberal scholars say that 1 Peter was probably written during the time of Trajan, beginning in 98 AD. This of course would date 1 Peter to a time long after Peter was martyred, presumably under Nero’s reign.

However, when we examine the nature of the persecution that Peter describes in his epistle, it's difficult to conclude that Christians were yet facing official, empire-wide persecution. The specific persecution Peter references throughout the epistle seems limited to verbal abuse and slander (2:12, 15; 3:9, 16; 4:12, 16). There are no specific mentions of the more intense oppression we might expect if this letter were written to Christians already facing official state-sponsored persecution. (For example, see the Book of Revelation.) This has led many to conclude that the persecution Peter's readers were facing was more local and unorganized. As the scholar Paul Achtemeier writes:

[T]he persecutions faced by the readers of 1 Peter were in the nature of the case due more to unofficial harassment than to official policy, more local than regional, and more at the initiation of the general populace as the result of a reaction against the lifestyle of the Christians than at the initiation of Roman officials because of some general policy of seeking out and punishing Christians. That does not rule out the possibility that persecutions occurred over large areas of the empire; they surely did, but they were spasmodic and broke out at different times in different places, the result of the flare-up of local hatreds rather than because Roman officials were engaged in the regular discharge of official policy.

-Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), pp. 35-36

Consequently, 1 Peter seems to reflect a time before Christians were persecuted as a matter of official Roman policy. Therefore, 1 Peter was written probably sometime not long before Nero started officially oppressing Christians, meaning that it's not impossible that Peter was the author.

As we've seen, the objections from liberal scholars do not even come close to overcoming the evidence in support of Peter's authorship. We can proceed with confidence that Peter was the author of 1 Peter.

So, now let's talk about Peter's audience.

Peter's Audience

Peter addressed his letter to "[those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.](#)" These regions were Roman provinces in Asia Minor or modern-day Turkey. Some scholars suggest that the order of the provinces listed in this verse is the order in which the letter would have traveled. Duane Watson remarks, for instance:

The provinces are listed in the order in which letters were delivered by the mail couriers working for the emperor and rich merchants, and likely the route Silvanus used to deliver copies of the letter. A ship sailing from Rome to this region would likely stop at Pontus, which begins the list, and the carrier could depart back to Rome from Nicomedia in Bithynia.

- Duane F. Watson & Terrance Callan, *First and Second Peter* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerAcademic, 2012), p. 7

Features of the letter have led some to conclude that Peter's audience was primarily made up of Jewish believers in Yeshua. For instance, there are many quotes and allusions to the Old Testament in the letter, indicating a Jewish audience. Additionally, exile is a prominent theme throughout the letter. Peter describes his readers as "exiles" (1:1; 2:11) and tells them to "conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile" (1:17). Peter's use of words such as "Dispersion" (1:1) and his description of Rome as "Babylon" (5:13) reinforce this exilic motif.

However, it's more likely that Peter's audience was mostly made up of Gentile believers. The fact that Peter describes their former life as one of ignorance and futility inherited from their forefathers (1:14, 18) indicates people who were not from a Jewish background. Their assumed knowledge of the Old Testament could be due to them being discipled into the Scriptures after having come to know the Lord. Peter's use of the exilic motif is actually a strategic way to identify his readers with Israel, helping them see that they are part of Abraham's family through the Messiah. As such, they too are exiles along with Israel. They are given the same mission and have the same hopes for the future.

So, now let's talk about Peter's greeting a little bit.

Peter's Greeting

What else can we learn from these first couple of verses in 1 Peter? Well, Peter's greeting gives us a preview of what the rest of his letter will be about. Let's take a look at it:

1 Peter 1:1-2

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ [Messiah Yeshua], To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ [Messiah Yeshua] and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

So, Peter begins by identifying his readers as elect exiles "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Messiah Yeshua and for sprinkling with his blood." This description gives us some clues about Peter's view of the identity and mission of believers. God the Father has elected them, the Spirit sanctifies them, and Yeshua has ransomed them by his blood. This will be explained further as we go through Peter's letter, but here's a brief overview of each of these ideas.

First, Peter says his readers are chosen "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." Just as the Messiah was "foreknown before the foundation of the world" (1:20) to fulfill God's plan of redemption through his death and resurrection, Peter says that his readers likewise were chosen in accordance with God's purposes. Despite how bad their situation might seem, they aren't there by mistake. God has a plan for them where they are. This theme is developed more in verses 3-12 of chapter 1.

Second, Peter's readers are "in the sanctification of the Spirit." The term sanctification involves not only the initial separation from one's sin and adoption into God's family by virtue of faith in Messiah but also the lifelong process of being conformed into the image of Messiah. The Holy Spirit works in us and helps us through this process of growing in holiness. This is developed in verses 13-17 of chapter 1.

Third, the sanctification of the Spirit is "for obedience to Messiah Yeshua and for sprinkling with his blood." Believers are chosen by God and sanctified so that we may obey Yeshua the Messiah. This means living holy lives per Yeshua's teachings and example. The phrase "for sprinkling with his blood," refers to the blood of the covenant. That is to say, Messiah's blood seals the covenant. This imagery is taken from Exodus 24:3-8, this is where Moses ratifies the covenant by sprinkling the sacrificial blood onto the people of Israel after they pledge their obedience to God. Well, Peter uses this same language, he uses the same imagery to speak of sprinkling Yeshua's sacrificial blood upon believers. His point is that the Spirit sanctifies believers to be obedient people of the covenant. Like Israel, Yeshua's followers have entered into a covenant with God, and the blood of Messiah ratified this covenant. This is

developed in verses 18-25.

Finally, Peter says, “May grace and peace be multiplied to you.” This was a common greeting among believers of the day. And, according to Peter, grace and peace are gifts from God given to all who are in Messiah Yeshua (5:14). So, let’s talk about this theme of exile.

Living in Exile

As we go through 1 Peter, you’re going to see clearly just how relevant Peter’s message is for us today. Like Peter’s original readers, we are living in a type of exile. We are sojourners in a land not our own, surrounded by a culture that is often hostile to our beliefs and how we live. Society disparages, maligns, and excludes us because of our identity as “Christians” (1 Peter 4:16).

To give a specific example from our modern context, have you ever heard of something called Cancel Culture? If not, basically, Cancel Culture is when someone expresses an unpopular opinion, which results in a mob of outraged people “canceling” him or her. Often, canceling someone takes the form of calling for a person to be fired from their job, removed from social media, and so forth. It’s a type of social ostracism. Much of the time, it’s some celebrity who has failed to adhere to society’s ever-changing cultural trends, but regular people have been victims of the online mob too.

As an example relevant to believers, some books by Christian and conservative authors have been dropped by major booksellers. Why? Because they challenged the cultural narrative regarding transgenderism.

Cancel Culture is an attempt to silence and punish those who dare hold to unpopular ideas. Well, as followers of Yeshua who believe the Bible, we hold *many* unpopular beliefs, don’t we? Modern secular culture is hostile toward our convictions regarding things like life, gender, and marriage. If you hold to Christian values regarding these issues, you will be called a bigot. You may lose friends or professional opportunities. Being a faithful follower of Messiah is not trendy.

Generally speaking, like Peter’s original audience, the vast majority of Christians in the West aren’t facing outright violence—not yet, at least. But in some ways we do face social exclusion and contempt because of what we stand for. Like the original readers of Peter’s letter, we know we don’t fit in, and we yearn for a time when we can feel at home, in a place of stability and peace. But in the meantime, we know we are called to engage with the culture and reason with them, defending the hope within us (1 Peter 3:15).

So, there’s a lot we can learn from Peter’s instructions. This letter explains how we are to live while we’re in this type of exile. Peter assures us of God’s love for us and his promise to one day bring us home—or perhaps more accurately, bring home to us—when Yeshua returns to earth to establish his kingdom. It’s this hope that empowers us to “[rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory](#)” (1 Peter 1:8), even as we face suffering and persecution.

While society does slander and exclude us, Peter reminds us that we are not excluded from God. In his initial greeting, Peter calls us God’s “elect.” We have an identity and a family and a mission.

As we study 1 Peter, may God give you wisdom on how to navigate the trials that come your way during your time of exile. May you be strengthened to be holy in all your conduct (1 Peter 1:14). And may you be encouraged as you await the coming of the Lord.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching.

Remember, continue to test everything.

Shalom!

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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