

The First Letter of Peter

Introduction to the Book:

1. The author: Peter, an apostle of the Lord. At the time of the writing, he is imprisoned in Rome ("Babylon," 5:13) under Nero in the early 60's (martyred in 64).
2. Date of composition: most conservative scholars date the writing in the early 60's.
3. The recipients: It seems the audience is largely, not exclusively, Christians of Jewish heritage scattered through several Roman provinces in Asia Minor (Turkey today), as "resident aliens."

The letter is not addressed to a particular church, lacking a normal salutation. It is a circular letter like Revelation. Some scholars surmise that it was carried by Silvanus, the companion of Paul, because of some similarities in wording of the epistle to the Thessalonians.



4. The theme of the book seems to be comfort and conduct amid ridicule and abuse because of Christian profession (5:13, "Stand fast in it [grace]").
5. If a verse captures the essence of the letter, it is 4:19. "Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful creator in doing what is right."

Comments on the Book:

- I. Introduction, 1:1-2
 - A. The author, v. 1a

- B. The recipients 1:1b-2a

1. The original readers ("resident aliens"), v. 1b
2. The location, v. 1c

3. Their comfort, vv. 1d-2c

Comfort amid trials and sufferings comes from reflecting not on the immediate circumstances, but upon the grace, mercy, and greatness of our God. Thus, a clue to comfort in trials is to focus on what we have in Christ, not upon what we think we may be losing. No matter the extent of the loss, they do not compare!

The fact: “chosen aliens”

The means of God’s choice:

The Father’s love (foreknowledge)

The Spirit’s regeneration (sanctification)

The end: obedience to Christ (see Acts 6:7 for a similar expression of faith/trust in Christ)

The result: daily cleansing through Christ’s sacrifice

C. The blessing, v. 2d

II. The Possessions of the Believer in Christ, 1:3-12

A. Our present possessions, vv. 3-5

This is a praise section. The apostle lists the things that we should joyfully recognize that God has granted to us.

1. The blessing of salvation, a living hope, v. 3

2. The blessing of a secure inheritance, v. 4a
“Imperishable, uncorruptible, unfading”

3. The blessing of security, vv. 4b-5
“reserved in heaven”

B. The reality of present circumstances: trials, vv. 6

1. The fact, v. 6
“if necessary”

2. The fruit: character development, v. 7

a. The benefit, v. 7a

Trials demonstrate the genuineness of our confession of Christ; it shows what we truly value. The faith of these people is not in doubt (v. 5); trials demonstrate what is already a reality.

3. The current perspective, vv. 8-9

a. Delight in God, v. 8

“... having not seen Him you love Him.”

b. Surety in God, v. 9

The purifying consequence of trials causes us to look beyond the temporal to the experience of our redemption and the wonder of life in Christ.

C. The present privilege, vv. 10-12

The connection with the subject of salvation is v. 9. Hence, these verses are an expansion of salvation as it relates to the OT and to the NT believers' greater privilege of insight.

Our comfort amid discomfoting circumstances, in part, is to remember what a wonderful privilege we have in our increased understanding of God's progressive revelation to His people. What the prophets could not grasp, and what angels can only ponder, we know more clearly. In Jesus, you have both a dying redeemer and a triumphant king!

1. An understanding the prophets sought, vv. 10-12a

The OT prophets (the reference is to the prophets as a collectivity) expended great intellectual energy to understand the meaning of their own writings seeking to understand the fulfillment of God's promises.

a. The quest, v. 10

Despite the diligent search of the Scriptures, the prophets could not understand how the promised one could combine the offices of prophet, priest, and king.

b. The conundrum, v. 11

Though the prophets possessed the Holy Spirit ("the Spirit of Christ within them"), they "hit a brick wall," so to speak, in seeing how the Christ could suffer and reign (they did not grasp an incarnation, a crucifixion, a resurrection and enthronement, centuries lapse of time, and then His return to consummate His kingdom).

With the advantage of the NT Scriptures, you and I can understand what the prophets found perplexing. The promised deliverer is more than a political deliverer who offered a physical kingdom of peace and protection from aggressors; He is a redeemer. The kingdom would come through a sacrificing savior, a sacrificial lamb, not a king initially. This promised redeemer would first be the greatest of all the prophets announcing His claims and promises, then a dying lamb-priest (a fulfillment of all the Passovers, the monthly and daily sacrifices) offering Himself for us (dying in our place to satisfy justice and righteousness), and now the king through His resurrection-enthronement (Dan. 7:13-14) who rules through His Church though now in His absence and in the future over a spotless kingdom forever with us as His inheritance forever. The NT tells us the meaning and message of the Hebrew Scriptures!

c. The realization, v. 12a

The prophets realized that the fulfillment of the things they could not understand would be realized later (that time arrived after Christ's resurrection).

"Those who preached the gospel to you" suggests that other than Peter carried the gospel to the readers.

2. A reality the angels longed to see, v. 12b

The angelic hosts of heaven are not the recipients of salvation, but they have a deep interest (literally, "a passionate desire") in understanding it. To do so, along with the prophets, they must understand progressive revelation.

III. The Personal Conduct of Believers, 1:13-2:10

[Basic Characteristics of Christian Living; or, How to be Prepared to Endure Trials].

Throughout the preceding section, the indicative mood has been used, indicating what is true. From this point onward the imperative mood becomes dominant. Blessings are the foundation of duties.

Summary: Our living hope should mark the way we live today, particularly when we experience suffering and pain.

A. Live prudently, 1:13-21

1. As sentinels: "Gird your minds," vv. 13-16

The spiritual life is a mental struggle; what you think about, what one focuses upon, is the foundation of the kind of life subsequently experienced.

a. The command, v. 13a

Rooted in the notion of preparing for an arduous task, such as running or hard labor, an OT male would take his shirt-like garment and fold it up into his waist belt to allow greater mobility. Girding up the garment means getting ready, being alert, for a task. The point of being "sober" is to be alert to one's circumstances as opposed to dullness caused by distraction, even intoxication.

b. The means, vv. 13b-16

1) Be inspired: a call to focus, v. 13b

This is the same grace for which the OT prophets made careful search (v. [10](#)). This clearly shows that the believers' hope is in the character and actions of the Triune God (cf. [1:2](#), [3-5](#)) and that His grace will be fully manifested at Jesus' return.

2) Be diligent: a call to action, vv. 14-16

We are to live in confident expectation, mentally preoccupied, with the wonder of our final redemption (while we have been delivered from the penalty of sin, there will be a time when we

will be delivered from its presence in our lives and in the world). This focus upon our spiritual heritage, being “chosen resident aliens,” has moral and attitudinal implications.

a) Stated negatively, v. 14

Using the metaphor of a child seeking to please his/her parents, the point is that we should not live as we did before redemption; it was a life of empty ignorance (see Rom. 12:2). Here may be a clue to the difficulties these people are facing; they have rejected their former lifestyle and are being mocked for it.

b) Stated positively, vv. 15-16

The adversative “but” tells us to expect a contrastive statement.

(1) The command, v. 15

We must be reminded that God, who gave us salvation, has called us to a different lifestyle, a life of moral integrity.

(2) The confirmation, v. 16

The foundation of Christian ethics is the character of God; He is the standard of right and wrong (Lev. 11:44). God delights in seeing His beauty in us!

2. As sojourners: “Pass the time in godly fear,” vv. 17 -21

The image in Peter’s mind is the redemption from the Egyptian exile. The emphasis is not so much on redemption itself, but its cost and consequence.

a. The command, v. 17

Returning to the father-child metaphor (v. 14), Peter tells us that like a “child,” we should respect and fear our “parent.” God is our judge as well as our father and membership in His family should not lead us to surmise that disobedience will go unnoticed or unrequited. Remember, Peter is talking about actions in a family, not the potential of being separated from the family. That is not possible, nor the subject under discussion. Family ties bring parental and offspring responsibility. Correction for protection is a father’s responsibility, obedience the children. Fear and love are not antithetical; perhaps a better translation of the word “fear” is “reverential awe.”

“The time of your exile” means our lives are experienced now as “resident aliens.” This life is our “wilderness;” the next is the “Promised Land.”

b. The reminder of our great salvation, v. 18-19

Morals are grounded in gratitude, an appreciation that leads to conformity. The way to act right is through thinking about right things. What is better than God's great grace?

1) The fact of our great redemption, v. 18a

We have been purchased by God through Christ's sacrifice from a life of tortured waste, broken promises, and empty hopes. What a description of life without Christ!

2) The cost of our great redemption, vv. 18b-19

Wealth, ethnicity, and heritage are not capable of accomplishing what Christ did for us. The cost was equal to the debt; the debt being infinite required an infinite payment. It was purchased for us by the substitutionary death of Christ, the blood of the incarnate Son of God!

The Passover lamb, whose blood was shed and placed on the doorpost so that the death angel would not destroy (Exod. 12:5), was a figure of the "true lamb," which would destroy death for us.

3) The divine plan for our great redemption, v. 20

God devised this plan in eternity; it was not an afterthought ("before the foundation of the world"). For God to know something would occur later is the same as assuring its happening. In this sense foreknowledge and predestination are synonymous in meaning. Imagine this: God loved us before we were created and planned for Christ to come to us and redeem us!

"Last days" refers to the era of our Lord's church.

Remember, the Jews envisioned two eras of time, the time of the promise of a redeemer (the OT) and the time of the fulfillment in the coming of the Messiah. We know this era has two parts: the first coming and the second coming, the church era and heaven.

4) The consequence of our great redemption, v. 21

God's acceptance of Christ's sacrifice for us is proven by the resurrection of our Lord and His enthronement in glory. As a result, you and I should be filled with trust, delight, and hope in God. We need not fear what people can do to us!! The God we are to fear is the One who gave us a Savior!

Thoughts:

1. Trials for all of us are realities. We live in a broken world among broken people who break into our tranquility. Peter tells us it is only for a “little while.” Considering eternity with God, whatever is our earthly lot, it is brief in comparison. Do you not long for the eternal day?
2. Whatever your disappointment in and with life, the remedy is to refocus your meditation. Think about how much God must love you having you in mind to be His from eternity, having determined to give you a redeemer from turning you from a life of futility, waste, and disobedience, and having allowed you to know what prophets could not and angels wanted to understand.
3. With mercy and grace comes obligation. We have been set free, but our freedom is to do something we could not previously. That is, to love and obey God seeking to conform our lives to His character as an action of delighting in and appreciation for what He has freely done through Christ.
4. The Christian life involves serious endeavor and thoughtfulness. We are to use our minds endeavoring to respond to God’s mercies. Holiness is not optional for us; God commands it!
5. We are to fear disobedience to God because He is a loving master who in His love corrects the disobedient among His children. We are to fear the consequences of treating His will lightly. In parental affection, He will curb our dangerous tendencies.
6. We must always keep before us the memory of the pit from which Christ has set us free, the enormous cost that was required, and the beauty of the One who did that for us. Do you do that on a regular basis? It will prove a mighty antidote to waywardness. You cannot think of the wonder of redemption and sinning at the same time. One must be out of your mind to consider the other!