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Introduction

Since its inception the church of Jesus Christ has experienced persecution, suffering, or at least the world's displeasure. Jesus was clear to instruct his disciples about this reality. This is the primary theme of 1 Peter. The church experienced hardships from the surrounding culture, and state-sponsored persecutions were becoming a reality under the reign of Nero.

Jesus said, "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household" (Matthew 10:24-25).

First we are aware that the suffering of the church is not something that God did not already know, and He is not surprised. When we understand that the very gates of Hell will not stand against the church, we can be greatly comforted that all setbacks are temporary and Christ and His church are victorious (Matthew 16:18).

Peter was acquainted with suffering. He had already been arrested several times by the Jewish authorities in the early days of the Jerusalem church (Acts 4,5,12). Also, Peter knew the manner of his death many years before it was to occur as Jesus had told Peter how his life would end (John 21:18).

We know from Scripture that Peter was originally named Simon. In Matthew 16 Jesus is recorded as giving him a new name, Peter, which means a rock. It is usual in the New Testament that he is called Simon when acting in accordance to his old nature, and when he is behaving like the new creation he is called Peter.

Challenges to Authorship

Some have tried to make the claim that Peter did not write this letter. Usually they challenge the literary features such as the large number of non-original words used. None of this is too worrisome as the vocabulary of the New Testament is quite limited and there is a good deal of crossover terminology with other authors.

On the other hand, some critics say Peter was a rough uneducated fisherman and could not have produced such a sophisticated epistle. This can be refuted by knowing that Peter lived in a Greek-speaking area around the Sea of Galilee. True, he was a fisherman, but he had people working for him and owned a large home in Capernaum. It is not necessary to think of him as an unlearned bumpkin, even if that was the opinion of the Sanhedrin who arrested him (Acts 4:13).

Also, we may assume that the Holy Spirit was amplifying his skills. Also, it is possible that his letter was dictated to a more educated amanuensis that was able to polish the style and improve upon the Greek. Anything is possible, but it is not necessary to deny Peter was the author.

Destination

The first verse states the intended audience of this letter. *To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia...* These provinces are located in modern Turkey. Some of these citizens were present in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost and could have founded early churches. Of course, Paul had been active in some of this area, and we know that the Holy Spirit prevented him from continuing his travels in Asia and led him to Europe.

Date and Place

This letter most likely would have been written just before the 64 A.D. Neronian persecution in Rome.

The letter suggests that it was written in “Babylon” as the salutation states (5:13). Naturally some have attempted to identify this mention of Babylon with the city in Mesopotamia but this is unlikely. There were few Christians in this particular area, and the region was sparsely populated in Peter’s time. There was another small Babylon on the Nile River but this would not seem to be a significant place for Peter to be. Rome was known as Babylon for its idolatry, debauchery, and this theme is repeated in Revelation 17 and 18.

Also, there is a strong tradition of Peter being in Rome and being martyred there by an upside down crucifixion. Paul was martyred about the same time, most likely by beheading as was customary for a Roman citizen, but Peter did not have Roman citizenship and crucifixion would have been the expected method of execution.

Purpose

1 Peter warns the church of increasing danger while recognizing that serious tribulation had already visited the church. In the face of such trouble the church is reminded that the world is a hostile place, and believers should consider themselves as a people just passing through. The ultimate hope for God’s people is in the unending kingdom that awaits His church. Therefore, believers are told to be obedient to God’s Word in spite of the world’s antagonism.

Ultimately this is a message of hope—a hope in God’s care for a people who are out of place and out of step with the sinful cosmos that confronts them. This is a message that will likely become more meaningful to American citizens as our beliefs are marginalized and we are viewed as either a silly people to be patronized or outright bigots because we do not share the immorality of the world.

Introductory Verses

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

Peter is stated to be the writer and his apostleship is clearly listed. There can be no confusion that the writer is some other person named Peter. The ancient church received this letter as genuine and there is no compelling reason to doubt its authenticity.

Any examination of the language and content will further support the scriptural quality of this correspondence to the early church.

To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia...

Peter reminds the recipients of two important facts, they are elect and they are exiles. God’s election reminds us that we have a secure position as God has known us and called us into his presence through the cross work of Jesus Christ.

This privilege is not recognized by the unbelieving culture. We need to remember that the world is at enmity with God and, by extension at enmity with Christians also. The world will never be our home and we should not over indulge in its ways knowing this is a foreign stopping point on our forever journey.

...according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood:

Whatever befalls us is not an accident, but God knows what He is doing and asking us to trust Him regardless of the pain and sorrow we may experience. Our sanctification is of His Holy Spirit and leads us to obedience to Jesus. What a glorious salvation we have in that we are sprinkled with the blood of Christ and made clean before a righteous God.

May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

The troubles of life may increase and even reach the point of an unbearable heaviness, but there is always a peace that is real, even if it surpasses our understanding. No true peace is found in that which is temporary, corrupt, and ultimately powerless.

