

INTRODUCTION TO 60TH AND 61ST BIBLEBOOK

THE FIRST AND SECOND LETTER OF PETER (A.D. 62-63 + A.D. 63-64)

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A. THE WRITER OF THE LETTERS OF PETER

The first letter of Peter begins with the words, “Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ.” The writer thus introduces himself as the known disciple and apostle of Jesus Christ. Several reasons prove that the writer was the disciple and apostle of Jesus Christ.

1. The writer saw Jesus Christ.

In 1 Peter 1:8, the writer says that the recipients of the letter had not seen Jesus Christ. This would only make sense if the writer himself had seen Jesus Christ! According to 1 Peter 5:1, the writer says that he was an eye-witness of the sufferings of Christ, that is, of the crucifixion. And in 1 Peter 1:3 the writer expresses what kind of effect (seeing) the resurrection of Jesus Christ had on him. He says that through his resurrection from the dead, the Lord Jesus Christ gave Christians new birth into a living hope.

2. The writer’s association with Mark in Jerusalem and Rome.

In 1 Peter 5:13, the writer says that Mark was his ‘son’ and that Mark and the people from ‘Babylon’ send greetings to the recipients of the letter. Acts 12:5 relates that Peter was well acquainted with Mark, because the early Christian church in Jerusalem met in the house of Mark’s mother and Peter was certainly there. Moreover, ‘Babylon’ is a figurative name for the godless city of Rome. Thus, these facts again point to Peter as the writer of this letter.

3. The second letter of Peter.

Also in the second letter of Peter, the writer introduces himself as ‘the apostle Simon Peter’. According to 2 Peter 1:16-18, the writer says that he was together with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, where he and the other disciples of Jesus saw his majesty and *heard* God’s voice from heaven acknowledging Jesus as his Son, the One he loves¹.

Moreover, throughout this letter, the writer *condemns* false prophets and those who exploit Christians with *stories they had made up* themselves (2:1-3). Therefore, if this letter had not been of the apostle Peter, the recipients as well as the Christian tradition would never have accepted this letter as being from Peter.

B. THE RECIPIENTS OF THE LETTERS OF PETER.

1. The area consisted of Asia Minor.

According to 1 Peter 1:1, Peter addressed this letter to “God’s elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia.” On a map, you can see that these Roman provinces comprised of almost the whole of Asia Minor or modern Turkey. *They lie almost in a circle.* This suggests that the person carrying the letter started in Pontus in the north, travelled south-east through Galatia towards Cappadocia, and thereafter travelled west towards Asia and ended again in the north in Bithynia. In all the churches spread over this wide area, the letter of the apostle Peter was read and probably copied.

2. The recipients are called ‘sojourners of the dispersion’.

Although these words in the Old Testament referred to the Jews who were scattered to foreign nations and lived in exile, it is clear that Peter uses it in a *figurative* sense. *The ‘sojourners of the dispersion’ do not refer to Jewish Christian churches, but to predominantly Gentile Christian churches spread all over Asia Minor.*

The apostle Peter uses a name borrowed from the Old Testament to describe the people he addresses. In a figurative or spiritual sense, all Christians are ‘sojourners’, ‘aliens and strangers living in tents in a foreign country’ or ‘exiles scattered all over’ the earth². This is confirmed by 1 Peter 2:11, in which Peter calls the Christians “aliens and strangers in the world”.

One reason why it cannot refer to Jewish Christian churches is that we do not have any historical evidence that there were ever such churches in Asia Minor. Except for individuals that were converted during Pentecost³, all the Christian churches in Asia Minor were founded by the apostle Paul and his fellow workers⁴.

The churches that were founded there consisted mainly of Gentile converts. Although there were *also Jewish converts, they formed one undivided church with the Gentile converts.* 1 Peter 1:18 and 4:3 make it quite clear that the recipients

¹ Matthew 17:1

² Hebrews 11:8-10

³ Acts 2:9-10

⁴ Acts 13, 14, 16

were Gentile converts. Before their conversion, the recipients were “*living an empty way of life*, which was handed down to them from their forefathers”. This could not be said of Jews, but only of Gentiles. Then “they had spent their time doing what pagans chose to do - living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and *detestable idolatry*.” The contrast in 1 Peter 4:3-4 was not between Gentiles and Jews, but between unconverted and converted Gentiles. Moreover, in 1 Peter 2:9-10, the apostle Peter says of the recipients that they are “a chosen people, ... a holy nation, a people belonging to God ... *Once they were not a people*, but now they are the people of God.” This only makes sense when the recipients were predominantly Gentile converts.

3. The recipients had received a precious faith.

According to 2 Peter 1:1, Peter says that the recipients had “received a faith as precious as ours”. This contrast can only refer to the Jewish and Gentile Christian conflict described in Acts 15. Soon after the first Gentiles became Christians, some Jewish Christians tried to force the Gentile Christians to also keep the Jewish Ceremonial Law. At that time, the apostle Peter made it very clear that all people, including Jews, are saved not by keeping the law, but by faith. Now in his letter, the apostle Peter once more reconfirms that statement. The Gentile recipients of his second letter had received the same precious faith as the early Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and elsewhere had received.

We therefore conclude that the recipients were mainly Gentile Christians spread all over Asia Minor.

C. THE DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING THE LETTERS OF PETER.

1. The first letter of Peter.

Peter wrote this letter from ‘Babylon’ (I 5:13). Because the letters of Peter make use of *many figurative words*, the word ‘Babylon’ must be considered as a figurative name for the godless city of Rome. When was the apostle Peter in Rome?

He was probably not in Rome during the first imprisonment of Paul in A.D. 60-61. Paul wrote Colossians from prison in Rome, mentions that Mark was with him⁵, but does not mention Peter at all. But when he wrote his first letter, he mentions that Mark and Silas were with him in Rome (I 5:12-13), but does not mention Paul at all. Therefore, Paul was probably not in Rome during that time. Thus, Peter must have written his first letter after Paul’s release from prison in A.D. 61, when Paul travelled to Crete, Asia Minor and probably to Spain.

In Rome Peter received information about the churches in Asia Minor. Although we do not know whether Peter ever worked in Asia Minor, *as an apostle he had the duty to care for churches wherever they were in the world*⁶. The Christians in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) were suffering unjustly (I 2:19) in spite of their good behaviour (I 3:17). They were suffering painful trials and insults for being Christians (I 4:12-19).

But while Christians in Rome and the Roman Empire were already suffering for their faith, it does not seem that the Christians in Asia Minor were treated brutally, as happened under the cruel persecution of the emperor Nero in A.D. 64. At that time, Nero himself put his own city of Rome on fire. When the citizens of Rome became very angry, Nero blamed the Christians and instigated a terrible persecution against them. According to early Christian tradition, both the apostle Peter and the apostle Paul died in this persecution of Nero against the Christians. However, the teaching of Peter with respect to the Roman government was so conciliatory that it would best fit the period *before the summer of A.D. 64* when Nero’s notorious persecution of Christians began.

Thus, we conclude that Peter wrote the first letter of Peter about A.D. 62-63 from Rome to the predominantly Gentile Christian churches spread all over Asia Minor, that is, modern Turkey.

2. The second letter of Peter.

In his second letter (II 3:1) Peter mentions the first letter he wrote. Thus, Peter wrote a second letter to the same recipients as his first letter. This letter was written during a time when the generation of the ‘fathers’ of the present scoffers in the world were dying (II 3:4). This is most probably during the sixties, because that would be the time when most of the people, who had possibly seen and heard Jesus Christ themselves in Judea or had been present at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost⁷ would be expected to die of old age. The generation of fathers had heard about the Second Coming during the thirties. That first generation of believing Christians and scoffing non-Christians died, without the Second Coming having taken place. Finally, Peter says that he himself expected to be put to death soon (II 1:14).

Therefore we conclude that Peter must have written his second letter about A.D. 63 or beginning of A.D. 64.

⁵ Colossians 4:10

⁶ Matthew 16:18-19

⁷ Act 2:9

D. THE DIVISION OF THE LETTERS OF PETER.

1. The first letter of Peter may be given the title: "Exhortation for sanctification amidst suffering."

The first letter of Peter may be divided into five parts as follows:

- 1 Peter 1. Christians have a living hope. Christians should live holy lives.
- 1 Peter 2. Christians are God's people. Christians should submit to earthly authorities.
- 1 Peter 3. Responsibilities of wives and husbands. Suffering for doing good.
- 1 Peter 4. Responsibility of every Christian to live for God and serve God. Suffering for being a Christian.
- 1 Peter 5. Responsibilities of elders and young men. Suffering caused by the devil.

2. The second letter of Peter may be given the title: "Exhortation to overcome seducers and scoffers by sanctification."

The second letter of Peter may be divided into three parts as follows:

- 2 Peter 1. Description of benefits of Christians.
Responsibility to work out their faith into other Christian qualities, which will prevent them from falling away.
- 2 Peter 2. Description of the godlessness of false teachers and their terrible judgement.
- 2 Peter 3. Description of the scoffing of false teachers and the certain Day of Judgement and renewal of the earth.
Exhortation to live holy and godly lives.

E. THE OCCASION, PURPOSE AND MAIN MESSAGE OF THE FIRST LETTER OF PETER

1. The first letter of Peter deals with the danger coming from the *outside* of the church, namely persecution.

The predominantly Gentile Christian churches in Asia Minor were facing difficult circumstances (I 1:7; I 4:12). Christians were suffering persecution, perhaps mainly from the people with whom they associated every day. Christians servants were being oppressed by their heathen masters (I 2:18-20) and Christian wives by their unbelieving husbands (I 3:1-2). Entire Christian families were being oppressed by their neighbours, because they refused to participate in the sinful life of their pagan neighbours (I 4:3-4) and were determined to live godly lives to God's glory among their pagan neighbours (I 2:12). In short, they were suffering because they were Christians (I 4:16).

But suffering caused some Christians to back-slide in their faith. The Christians had expected that their lives would become better when they became Christians and they had not expected that they would be persecuted and suffer (I 4:12). Therefore, their old sinful and worldly life began to attract them again, so that the apostle Peter had to exhort them to live holy and godly lives (I 1:14-16; I 2:11-12; I 4:2-4).

The purpose of the first letter of Peter was:

- to strengthen the Christians in their suffering
- to warn them against back-sliding and again participating in the old sinful life-style of pagans
- to stimulate them to live holy and godly lives
- to exhort them to do what Jesus Christ did when he suffered and
- to hope unshakably on the Second Coming of Jesus Christ!

2. The apostle Peter especially teaches that suffering serves God's inscrutable purposes.

- Suffering serves to purify faith and stimulate holy living. The various trials Christians have on earth serve to purify their faith, so that it may become more and more genuine and may result in glorifying God on earth (II 1:7). It is an incentive to live a holy and godly life on earth (II 1:15). Looking behind the scenes, suffering is caused by Satan (I 5:8), but in last analysis suffering never happens without the permission of God's sovereign will (I 4:19). The fact that suffering comes to the Christian brotherhood in every place in the world (I 5:9), should encourage Christians that suffering is not unusual! Suffering serves to make Christians strong and stand firm all the time before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ (I 5:10).

- Christians ought to react to suffering as Christ did. 1 Peter 2:21-23 teaches that the way Jesus Christ reacted towards his earthly suffering was *an example for Christians in their suffering*. When Jesus Christ was insulted, he did not retaliate and when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead he entrusted himself to God who will judge the persecutors justly. Therefore, Christians should also not retaliate or make threats, but also entrust their difficult situations to God who will judge their persecutors in his own time.

Throughout their suffering, Christians must never forsake the truth of the Christian faith, but faithfully continue to witness for Jesus Christ (I 3:15-16). Throughout their suffering, Christians must always show sincere love for brothers (I 1:22) and even cover up the multitude of sins of other people (I 4:8). Throughout their suffering, Christians must remain blameless and never do anything that would cause the non-Christians to blame or criticise the Christians (I 2:18-20; I 3:17; I 4:15-16).

- Suffering in this present life will result in eternal glory at the Second Coming of Christ. Suffering causes Christians to look forward to the Second Coming of Christ. By enduring persecution and suffering on earth they will receive grace (I 1:13), joy (I 4:13) and the crown of glory (I 5:4) at the Second Coming.

F. THE OCCASION, PURPOSE AND MAIN MESSAGE OF THE SECOND LETTER OF PETER.

1. The second letter of Peter deals with the danger coming from the *inside* of the church, namely false teachers.

These teachers taught false teachings and scoffed about true Christian teachings. Peter's main purpose was to strengthen the Christians against false teachers and their heresies. Everywhere in the world the Christian Church faces the evil of false teachers and their false teachings. The visible conflict between the Christian Church and the evil world, including false teachers, reveals the invisible conflict between Jesus Christ and Satan. There have always been false prophets throughout the Old Testament days and there will always be false teachers throughout the New Testament days. The apostle Peter warned the Christians that these false teachers would also come to the churches in Asia Minor.

2. Chapter 1 says that Christians must work out their faith in order to prevent back-sliding.

Christians have been given everything they need to live holy and godly lives (II 1:3-4). But Christians also have been given the responsibility to add to their faith all kinds of Christian virtues, like goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love (II 1:5-7). *Only when Christians grow spiritually and bear fruit, can they ever be sure of their calling and election (II 1:8-11). Without growth and fruit-bearing, there can never be assurance of salvation!*

3. Chapter 2 says that false teachers will be characterised by their lives, by their methods and by their teachings.

As to their lives, false teachers are especially characterised by immorality. They follow the corrupt desires of their sinful nature (II 2:10). They are motivated by sinful pleasure and carouse and feast in broad daylight (II 2:13). They are especially characterised by being sexually immoral. They seduce the unstable to sexual immorality (II 2:14) and appeal to the lustful desires and sinful human nature of people (II 2:18).

As to their methods, the false teachers are especially characterised by greed (II 2:14). They secretly introduce their destructive heresies among the Christians (II 2:1). In their greed, they exploit ignorant and naive Christians with stories that they have made up themselves (II 2:3). They especially target unstable Christians (II 2:14).

As to their teachings, the false teachers are especially characterised by rejecting authority (II 2:10). Above all they deny the sovereign Lord, in whom they first believed (II 2:1). They despise the authority of the Bible and its teachings. They bring God's truth in disrepute (II 2:2). They arrogantly slander and blaspheme in matters they do not understand (II 2:12). They leave the straight way and wander off to follow false teachers and false prophets (II 2:15). Finally, they scoff at the biblical teaching of the Second Coming of Christ (II 3:3-4).

The false teachers and godless people of chapter 2 are the same people as those who scoff in chapter 3. Note that there is a direct link between what a person believes and how he lives! *These false teachers twist the teachings of the Bible in order to give themselves a licence to sin!* And because they live lives of sin, they deny the Second Coming of Christ to judge and punish all godlessness and wickedness. In this way they try to convince themselves that there would be no judgement or punishment for them. But they are only misleading themselves! Behind godless and wicked lives is always a godless and wicked way of thinking. The past history proves that God will certainly judge the wicked and will certainly save the righteous (II 2:4-9). Therefore, the false teachers and godless people will certainly be paid back with harm for the harm they have done (II 2:13).

4. Chapter 3 teaches that the Day of Judgement and the renewal of the universe comes at the Second Coming.

As certain as the old world before the time of Noah was judged and destroyed by a flood of *water*, so certainly will this present sinful world be destroyed by *fire* (II 3:6-7). The godless and wicked people will perish (II 3:7) and the new earth will be a home only for the righteous people (II 3:13). The fact that all this is not happening immediately, is because God wants none of the recipients of this letter to perish, but bring everyone to repentance (II 3:9). The Day of Judgement will come as soon as God's plan of salvation has been completed. Therefore, Christians must make every effort to live holy and godly lives (II 3:11,14).