

ABOUT THE BOOK

Good Morning! Yesterday, as you read this letter from the Apostle Peter to believers who were scattered throughout different regions in the Roman Empire, you might have noticed there were many themes and topics that he broached with them. Subjects that were to affirm them, to encourage, strengthen and exhort. He reminds them of the greatness of their salvation, and how to live as a Christian in a world that was not their own. To stand firm in God's grace in the face of opposition and understand their need for spiritual growth to accomplish that. Things that were not only beneficial to the believers in the early church, but God, knowing the place we would be in today, provided to teach and grow us, as well.

Before we dig into those different topics, let's set the background of this letter, and get a more historical perspective of what was taking place in that day.

THE WRITER: Look again at Chapter 1, verse 1. Who is writing the letter, and who does he say he is?

"Peter identifies himself as the apostle of Jesus Christ in the salutation to this epistle (1:1). This claim [Peter as the writer] has never been seriously questioned among evangelical scholars. The book was accepted to be the divinely inspired Word of God by Peter from earliest times in Christian churches. First Peter is quoted by Clement of Rome, Polycarp, and other early fathers of the Christian church." - Dr. Troy Welch, The Epistle of First Peter

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Known as Simon, Simon Peter, Peter, Cephas. He answered to all. He grew up in the fishing village of Bethsaida at the northern end of the Sea of Galilee. He and his brother, Andrew both worked in the family business as fishermen before they became followers of John the Baptist. They followed him from Galilee to the Jordan River. John the Baptist, you'll remember was the cousin of Jesus, born about six months before Him, he became the forerunner declaring the need for repentance, announcing the Messiah had come and baptizing all who would repent.

It was John who introduced them to Jesus. **Read John 1:35-42.**

It was a meeting with radical consequence for Simon. Jesus immediately changed Simon's name to Cephas, which is Aramaic for the Greek name, Petros, or Peter. It means stone, or rock. Now, if you know anything about Peter's life, you'll know that he wasn't given the name "rock" because he was steadfast and solid like a rock. No, the stories told during the three years that Peter traveled with Jesus show him as impulsive, a little reckless, and often, more talk than his actions could back up. Remember his attempt to walk on water (Matthew 14:22-31)? Or his adamant declaration that he would never deny Christ, only to do so three times before the cock crowed (Matthew 26:69-75)? Impulsive Peter. Jumping to action without thinking things through (Matthew 26:51-52 is another example of that). But you have to love his zeal and exuberance!

Jesus knew the changes that would come to Peter, changes that God would make in his life. Spiritual maturity takes time with God, understanding His word, being less impulsive and instead, being controlled by the Holy Spirit. Peter eventually became a rock, both in name and character, all because of an encounter with the Savior, Jesus Christ. The Lord has blessed us with many examples of people who were changed because they walked with Him. It provides hope for the changes He will make in us, wouldn't you agree?

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Peter addresses himself as "an apostle of Jesus Christ." The term, "apostle" = (apostolos) is a Greek naval term, and it means: an officer that has been given the battle plan and is to disperse the plan to those under him. God had given Peter the battle plan. As a leader of the church his job was to pass that information along to those under his authority, including those who were scattered, so that they would not only know what they were up against, but could stand with resolve because of the hope in the future. They could even rejoice during the battle because of God's sweet grace that provided all they needed to stand firm.

Here are some fascinating facts about the requirements of an "apostle" per Dr. Troy Welch:

- 1. An Apostle had to be an eyewitness to the Resurrected Christ (I Corinthians 9:1; 15:8-9).*
- 2. The disciples were appointed to be apostles to Israel during the earthly ministry of Christ (Matthew 10:6). No Apostle was appointed to the Church until after the resurrection of Christ (Ephesians 4:11). They were appointed by God (Romans 1:1, Ephesians 1:1).*
- 3. Special spiritual gifts were given to the Apostle to serve as his credentials (I Corinthians 12: 9-10c). The Holy Spirit provided the gifts they needed (I Corinthians 12:11).*
- 4. Apostles received direct revelation from God.*
- 5. Apostles exercised absolute authority until the scriptures were completed. There is no office of Apostle today. The Bible is the only authority and contains all of the battle plan we need.*

Peter qualified. Having traveled with Jesus during His three years of ministry, he witnessed firsthand, miracle after miracle, from the healing of the lame, to giving sight to the blind, to even the resurrection of the dead. Meeting with the Resurrected Christ on several occasions

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and witnessing His transfiguration, Peter had eyewitness testimony of all Christ did, and became entrusted with power from on high to perform many signs and wonders as proof of the veracity of the gospel he was sharing. As one of the three major leaders of the early church, Peter became one that God used to spur the growth of the beginning church; it was Peter who preached at Pentecost, and he was instrumental in spreading the gospel, not only to the Jews but also to the Greeks.

It would be years later that he would be martyred for his faith. The story goes, that not feeling worthy to die as his Savior did, he asked to be crucified upside down. The year was approximately 64-65 a.d.

TIME OF THE WRITING - They believe the time of the writing of this letter to be sometime between 62-64 a.d., near to the time of his death, and during the difficult days of Nero's persecution of believers.

THE RECIPIENTS - 1:1-2 "Those who reside as aliens, scattered... chosen according to the foreknowledge of God." Nero had declared war on Christians. It would be that persecution of Christianity that caused these believers to be dispersed throughout the Roman Empire.

Peter called them, "the diaspora" - the scattered. Believers who had to leave their homes, to reside in foreign places, among people who were not their own. Aliens living in the region of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia.

Though the letter describes the hardships and suffering they were enduring, it's not a pessimistic letter, by any means. Instead, Peter writes to encourage them to stand firm even though they were up against obstacles they would never have chosen.

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Did you note that the letter speaks of joy, of grace, of hope... right next to those words of submission and suffering? It's especially comforting to know, that in Christ, those words can co-exist, simultaneously.

Peter teaches doctrines established to cause their spiritual growth, but ties it all up in the package of the precious gift of Jesus that provides all the hope they need to endure.

The letter gives the same encouragement to us today. As believers in the Lord Jesus, our true citizenship is in heaven, and though we reside in this world, among a people that are not our own, we too, are to stand firm in the grace God has given, living each day in the fullness of hope of the salvation to come, recognizing how blessed we are with our future secure in Christ Jesus. Then, we can "rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory," as could "the diaspora."

Simon, a simple fisherman had his life changed forever by the encounter with the Messiah. He was a follower, who became an "apostle of Jesus Christ," a leader of the early church, God did a miraculous work in him over the years. The believers who were scattered knew great change too, having to move because of their faith in the Lord Jesus, leaving the familiar, fear of the government moved them away from home. All part of the Father's battle plan to share Christ with the world.

How has God changed you? Take time to thank Him even now.

What change does God want to make in you?

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We may not understand all that is taking place in our world, but God knows exactly how He will use it for His master plan, and the beauty of it is, that He has promised to use it for our good if we love Him and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

As we study in the coming weeks, my prayer is that we will be open to allow those changes that the Lord desires to make in us. That we will fully cooperate with His Spirit in whatever growth He is calling us to, pangs and all. That we won't fear the change, but instead, embrace it, eager for the growth to be more like Christ.

End today's lesson by reading Chapter 1, verses 1-12, and we'll pick up there tomorrow.

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Review:

- Text: 1 Peter 1:1
- Peter, from fisherman to follower to leader (1 Peter 1:1)
- An apostle, one with the battle plan, who is to dispense it to those under him
- Requirements of an apostle
- The "Diaspora," those scattered for their faith, alien residents whose citizenship is in Heaven (1 Peter 1:1)
- The Father's battle plan