

1 PETER: HOW TO LIVE IN A HOSTILE WORLD

INTRODUCTION

This letter is addressed to Christians who are undergoing suffering of different kinds. It tries to encourage believers by providing keys in how to endure and develop inner strength and peace in situations where change or freedom are not possible.

While the author of the letter has been identified as the apostle Peter from early in the church's history, many scholars challenge this view. They claim:

- The excellence of the Greek cannot be expected from the hand of a simple Galilean fisherman;
- The intense persecution mentioned in the letter probably took place after the 1st century AD;
- The letter doesn't reflect the personal acquaintance with Jesus that Peter would have had.

Thus, such scholars claim a date of the writing of this letter at about 112 AD by a disciple of Peter.

Other scholars argue for Peter being the author, for the following reasons:

- Sylvanus was the writer of the letter although Peter dictated its contents (5:12);
- The persecutions could have taken place in Peter's time;
- The letter does indicate a close personal bond between Peter and Jesus.

Therefore, the letter is dated at about 64 AD, with Peter as its author. This view is supported by early church documents of the 2nd and 3rd century.

The letter was probably written in Rome (the word Babylon (5:13) is code for Rome).

The readers of the letter were Christians living in Asia Minor (present day Turkey), both Jews and Gentiles.

COMMENTARY

1) What kinds of things are Christians suffering?

- Persecution within the wider world for being Christians and living a certain way. Persecution for having given up a certain lifestyle in the world.
- Persecution in society, wives under their husbands, slaves under their masters, Christians under local authorities.

2) What kinds of support and advice does Peter offer them?

- The coming of Christ and his redemption of all who believe in him was long foreseen and has eternal value. Nothing that happens to Christians now or is done to them can change their eternal destiny and reward for being faithful. They should hang in there.
- Christians should cultivate humble love with each other and maintain a purity and simplicity of lifestyle in a world of greed, debauchery, hatred, bitterness, despair and immorality.
- Practically, this means that wives should submit to their husbands even when it's hard and unfair, the same for slaves with their masters and Christians under local authorities. Why? They should give no excuse to non-Christians for accusing them of being hypocrites, false to their beliefs, or bad and disloyal citizens of the empire. The issue here is not about the ultimate justice of equality of men and women in a marriage, the injustice of slavery or the corruption of rulers. It is how to live the best you can as a Christian within flawed systems.
- On a spiritual level, by maintaining a holy life of obedience, humble and generous love, sincerity, self-control, etc., Christians cultivate endurance and hope in their spirits and love in the hearts. By such practices they can feel pity for their accusers rather than resent them for their abusive ways. By not allowing the actions of their persecutors to get to them, Christians gain moral power over them and develop an inner bond with God that nothing can shake.
- By undergoing suffering in the right spirit, Christians come closer to Christ who set the pattern for how to live through suffering in his own life and death. His resurrection is the basis of hope for all who follow him. God will raise them up and vindicate them against all those who oppress and abuse them. Their destiny is secure, eternally. They are God's own people with a holy purpose to testify to what God has done in them. The fact that they experience suffering makes their witness of love and self-control much more powerful.
- This does not mean that suffering is justified or that abusers and oppressors are not condemned. They will be held accountable before God. For now, they have the power and there is no way to change that. But this will change, and relative to eternity, the present suffering is only for a brief time.