

Introduction to 1 Peter

Where is it in the Bible?

First Peter is the twenty-first book in the New Testament and is found between James and 2 Peter. It is one of the catholic or general letters (James through Jude).

Who wrote it?

Although the letter claims to have been written by the disciple Peter (1:1), many scholars believe it was written by an unknown author some years after his death. Since this was an accepted practice in antiquity, the recipients of the letter would have understood the references to Peter at the beginning and end of the letter as literary devices.

When was it written?

The dating of this epistle depends on its authorship. If Peter wrote the letter, it was probably written in the early to mid 60s, after Peter came to Rome, but before the violent persecution of Christians began (2:13-14). If the letter was written by someone other than Peter, it could have been written almost anytime in the last third of the first century. Some feel it must have been before 89 when the persecutions under Emperor Domitian began. Others suggest a date in the early 90s.

What is it about?

First Peter was written to encourage believers who were suffering trials and hardships. It was probably written for a general audience of churches, rather than for a specific community. The letter emphasizes the hope believers have because of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus and uses his experiences as an example of how they should live faithfully in a hostile society.

How is it structured?

- I. Salutation (1:1-2)
- II. What God Has Done in Christ (1:3-12)
- III. Call to Live as Holy People (1:13-2:3)
- IV. Jesus as the Foundation of New Life (2:4-10)
- V. Living in a Hostile Society (2:11-4:11)
 - a. Servants of God (2:11-17)
 - b. Slaves and the Example of Christ's Suffering (2:18-25)
 - c. Husbands and Wives (3:1-7)
 - d. Suffering for Doing Good (3:8-22)
 - e. Living for God (4:1-11)

VI. Persevering in Suffering (4:12-5:11)

VII. Closing (5:12-14)

What are some things to look for?

- **Earthly Authorities:** One of the notable things about 1 Peter is its emphasis on submitting to non-Christian authorities including the Roman emperor, unbelieving masters, and husbands who do not accept the faith. In contrast to other places in the New Testament, here those in authority are not instructed to be responsible in their exercise of authority; for example, there is nothing about how masters should treat their slaves as there is in Ephesians 6:9 and Colossians 4:1. Although there are other possible explanations, many scholars feel that this was because the author felt that Christians had to demonstrate that the faith was not a threat to the existing social order.
- **Hope:** First Peter is filled with hope. The author refers to Jesus as the “living hope” (1:3) and the recipients are urged to “set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you” (1:13) and on God (1:21). Christians are expected to give “an accounting for the hope” that is in them(3:15).
- **Images for the Church:** There are a number of images for the church in 1 Peter, including the new Israel, the priesthood of all believers, a living temple, and a flock of sheep.
- **Unjust Suffering:** Many passages in 1 Peter talk about abuse the recipients are suffering (2:12; 3:16;4:14). Most of this seems to be verbal abuse, although slaves may have been physically abused (2:19-20). The cause of this seems to be that the Christians' new faith has cut them off from previous associations so that they have become social outcasts. The author urges them to understand that what is happening enables them to share in the sufferings of Christ and can be a way to test and increase faith. He encourages them to look at the church as their new community and to behave honorably.