

THE FIRST LETTER OF



PETER

KEN FLEMING



Developed as a study course by Emmaus Correspondence School, founded in 1942.



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The First Letter of Peter

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Published by:

Emmaus Correspondence School
(A division of ECS Ministries)
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First Edition 2008 (AK '08), 2 UNITS

Reprinted 2010 (AK '08), 2 UNITS

Reprinted 2015 (AK '08), 2 UNIT

ISBN 978-1-59387-093-5

Code: 1PET

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Printed in the United States of America

STUDENT INSTRUCTIONS

Peter was the most prominent of the twelve disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. He became the main spokesman for the early church in Jerusalem but later traveled among the early churches, including some that the apostle Paul had established.

At the time Peter was writing, persecution against Christians was increasing and they were under pressure to deny their new faith. In this letter (the first of two written by Peter that are part of the Bible), Peter wrote to encourage believers now living in the five provinces of Asia Minor to remember that they were pilgrims traveling toward heaven and just temporary residents in this world. His letter is full of practical instruction on attitudes and behavior to strengthen their faith and witness. The world has always been (and will continue to be) hostile to Jesus Christ and His followers. In light of that, the letter of 1 Peter contains both relevant and needed teaching and encouragement for Christians today.

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Course Components

This course has two parts: this study course and the exam booklet.

How To Study

This study has eight chapters, and each chapter has its own exam. Begin by asking God to help you understand the material. Read the chapter through at least twice, once to get a general idea of its contents and then again, slowly, looking up any Bible references given.

Begin studying immediately, or if you are in a group, as soon as the group begins. We suggest that you keep a regular schedule by trying to complete at least one chapter per week.

Exams

In the exam booklet there is one exam for each chapter (exam 1 covers chapter 1 of the course). Do not answer the questions by what you think or have always believed. The questions are designed to find out if you understand the material given in the course.

After you have completed each chapter, review the related exam and see how well you know the answers. If you find that you are having difficulty answering the questions, review the material until you think you can answer the questions. It is important that you read the Bible passages referenced as some questions may be based on the Bible text.

How Your Exams Are Graded

Your instructor will mark any incorrectly answered questions. You will be referred back to the place in the course where the correct answer is to be found. After finishing this course with a passing average, you will be awarded a certificate.

If you enrolled in a class, submit your exam papers to the leader or secretary of the class who will send them for the entire group to the Correspondence School.

See the back of the exam booklet for more information on returning the exams for grading.

1

INTRODUCTION TO 1 PETER

The Pilgrim in a Hostile World

First Peter is a letter written by the apostle Peter to believers who were living under an increasing threat of persecution for their faith in Jesus Christ. As it is included in our Bibles we can trust it to be a message from God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and relevant to us today. It is about living out a triumphant faith in a hostile world. It is written to pilgrims who are on their way to a better country—heaven. It is written to Christian believers in an unbelieving world where they find life difficult because they no longer belong there; they have become strangers to it. This letter is written to you and me.

The Historical Background

In the first century AD, pressure was building against the early Christians throughout the Roman Empire. The area in which Peter's readers now lived was Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). The world around them was becoming increasingly hostile to Christianity. It was in this area that evangelists Paul and Barnabas had been put out of several towns—and even stoned—by a Jewish element that was upset by the message they proclaimed, that Jesus *was* the Messiah (Acts 13-14). And in one example of Gentile hostility, heathen business interests in the province of Asia felt threatened by the Christian message and started a riot (Acts 19).

By the early sixties, the effect of the Christian gospel was turning whole communities against believers. Jewish communities were upset by its message that included teaching on freedom from the Law of Moses in light of free salvation through faith in Christ's substitutionary death. Idol

worshippers were upset by the Christians' insistence that there was only one God and only one Way to Him, Jesus Christ. A decadent society was becoming aggressively hostile to Christianity's high moral standards by which it was condemned. The Roman Caesars were increasingly disturbed that Christians would not offer incense to them or worship them as gods. The first century world was hardening its heart to God's grace.

We can, to some degree, identify with the believers to whom Peter wrote this letter. We, too, sometimes have to endure this kind of pressure, where true Christians face opposition from both religious and secular interests. In many parts of the world, Christians are suffering material hardship, social estrangement, imprisonment, and even loss of life for their faith. Peter's letter gives practical guidelines on how to live as a Christian in a hostile world. It helps us to face the trials that result from declaring public allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ. We look back to Him in His suffering and can understand our own. We then look forward to rejoicing at being with Him in His glorified state and we understand that this is the purpose of God in history. The trial of our faith leads us eventually to triumph in Christ. To embattled believers in every age, this first century letter is a priceless treasure.

Peter, One of the Twelve Disciples

More than thirty years had elapsed since Peter experienced firsthand being a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter (originally named Simon, but renamed Peter by Jesus) was a fisherman by trade. His home was in Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee and he was in business with his brother Andrew. Andrew was, like Peter, called by Jesus to be a "fisher of men" (Matt. 4:18-19).

For three years, Peter accompanied Jesus in His witness and ministry to the Jewish people in Judea and Galilee. A reading of the four Gospels will show that Peter was the most prominent of the twelve disciples. It was Peter who, along with James and John, made up the "inner circle" of the disciples chosen by the Lord to witness certain healings and significant events, including the transfiguration and Christ's agony in Gethsemane (Mark 5:37; Matt. 17:1-8; 26:37). It was Peter who appears to have recognized Christ's deity at an early point, prompting him to confess his own sinful state (Luke 5:3-8). It was Peter who walked on the stormy lake, only to sink when he took his eyes off Jesus (Matt. 14:27-31).

It was Peter who had verbally confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God (Matt. 16:16). It was to Peter that Jesus replied that the church was to be founded on the “rock-solid” truth which Peter had just confessed. It was to Peter that the keys of the kingdom of heaven were given (Matt. 16:18-19). And yet it was Peter who thought that it was enough to forgive a person just seven times (Matt. 18:21); who refused, at first, to let Jesus wash his feet (John 13:8); and who rashly promised to never forsake Jesus but then openly denied even knowing Him when challenged (Matt. 26:33, 69-75).

Over the course of Jesus’ public ministry Peter would have witnessed the steady rise in hostility toward Him among the Jewish religious leaders. The nation of Israel followed their leaders in rejecting Jesus as their Messiah. They condemned Him to die a criminal’s death by means of crucifixion in Jerusalem. Peter witnessed it all. But it was Peter’s joy and consolation to not only see the empty tomb but to have been visited by the risen Christ Himself (Luke 24:34). Peter was now forgiven for denying Him and restored to fellowship with His Savior and Lord. It was Peter that the risen Christ charged with “feeding” His sheep after His ascension to heaven (John 21:15-17).

Peter, the Apostle

Peter used one of the “keys” of the kingdom on the day of Pentecost when, in the power of the Holy Spirit, he boldly preached that Jesus’ resurrection proved He *was* Israel’s promised Messiah (the Christ). As a result, 3,000 Jews repented of crucifying Him and were forgiven and saved (Acts 2:1-38). From the book of Acts chapters 2 through 12 we learn that Peter became the main spokesman for the early church in Jerusalem. In these chapters we see Peter preaching the gospel (particularly Christ’s resurrection), performing healing miracles, standing up courageously against threats from the Jewish leaders, suffering physical abuse for his stand for Christ, and disciplining sinning believers. We even see him being imprisoned and then being freed by an angel!

It was Peter’s privilege to use the second of God’s “keys” when he introduced the gospel to the Gentiles through a man named Cornelius. When he and other Gentiles believed Peter’s message that Jesus was the Messiah of Old Testament prophecies, God poured out His Spirit in a second Pentecost-like experience. It was Peter who reported this significant event to

the church's leaders in Jerusalem. They trusted his account of it as evidence that God was, by His grace, now saving Gentiles through their personal faith in Christ, just as He was saving Jews (Acts 10:1-11:18).

Later, when the apostle Paul brought Titus, the converted Gentile, to Jerusalem, it was Peter who gave them “the right hand of fellowship” (Gal. 2:1-9). It was also Peter who visited the first Gentile church in Antioch and affirmed the gospel as preached by Paul and Barnabas (Gal. 2:10-14). Finally, at the Jerusalem Council, it was Peter who again plainly stated that, by God's grace, salvation was freely available to both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 15:1-21). That was about the year AD 40. Peter had faithfully and effectively used “the keys of the kingdom” that the Lord had entrusted to him.

Peter's Later Life

From that point on, the New Testament provides only a few hints about Peter's life. He probably did not stay in Jerusalem; we do not see his name mentioned in later New Testament references to the church there. He may well have become an itinerant (traveling) missionary to people of Jewish background, very much as Paul did to those who were Gentiles (Gal. 2:9). It appears that he was married and that his wife traveled with him (Matt. 8:14; 1 Cor. 9:5). He seems to have visited the church in Corinth, where one of the divisive elements was a group that boasted of Peter as their leader (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:21-22).

It is probable that Peter had at least visited churches in the five provinces of Asia Minor mentioned that he is writing to, that is, Pontus, Bithynia, Asia, Galatia, and Cappadocia (1 Pet. 1:1). It will be helpful to the student to look at a map at this point (usually found in the back of most Bibles). There was plenty of time—nearly twenty-five years—for him to work extensively in a large area like this.

Peter is also associated with the city of Babylon, from which he wrote this letter (1 Pet. 5:13). He was evidently in Rome at the end of his life. The Bible does not mention this, but from statements made by Clement of Rome writing in the year AD 96, it appears that Peter died in Rome under the persecution of Nero about the year 67. *Unger's Bible Dictionary* takes the view that Peter did not arrive there until the year of his death, which seems to best fit the evidence we have. Tradition has it that he was condemned to die by crucifixion, the same death suffered by Jesus Himself. He asked,

however, to be crucified upside down, as he did not count himself worthy to suffer exactly the same kind of death as his Lord.

The People to Whom Peter Wrote

The readers of 1 Peter lived in the five provinces already named. Three of these are mentioned in the New Testament in connection with the apostle Paul. Paul planted four churches in Galatia on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:14-14:23). On his second journey, Paul had expressed a plan to go to Bithynia, but he was refused permission to do so by the Holy Spirit (Acts 16:7). Paul planted the large church at Ephesus in Asia on his third missionary journey (Acts 19:1-20:1). Peter probably evangelized further north than the Galatian and Asian cities where Paul worked.

Peter wrote to established churches that were under the care of elders (5:1). He was probably not the first evangelist among them, as he refers to “those who preached the gospel to you” (1:12). But the epistle (letter) does imply that Peter had worked among them and that, in writing, he was carrying out the instructions of the Lord Jesus to feed His sheep (John 21:15-17).

The believers to whom Peter wrote included both slaves (2:18-21) and free citizens (2:16). Some of them had been Gentile idolaters, for he described them as having been “called out of darkness into His marvelous light” (2:9). They had been delivered from heathen practices such as “abominable idolatries” (4:3-4). It is likely that some were from a Jewish background as Peter quotes freely from the Old Testament, with which they would have been familiar. Peter sums up his readers’ identity when he closes the letter with a benediction of peace “to . . . all who are in Christ Jesus” (5:14). Whatever their ethnic roots or social standing were, they were one in Christ. We who read and study this letter today are included.

The Place of Origin and the Date of Writing

The identity of Babylon from which Peter was writing has been widely debated (5:13). Many commentators have assumed that Peter was in Rome when he wrote 1 Peter and that the word Babylon is a cryptic reference to it. However, there is no firm evidence that Peter was in Rome before the year of his death. It seems better to understand Babylon as naturally referring to the well-known city by that name on the River Euphrates. Peter

probably went there to minister to believers. These people may have had some previous contact with those to whom Peter wrote, as they sent their greetings to them.

The date of writing was almost certainly before the persecution under Nero in the year AD 67 because there is no mention of martyrs. Peter, however, does see impending trouble for believers. He speaks of “those who revile your good conduct” and those who are “speaking evil of you” (3:9, 16; 4:4). In view of the increasing pressure, a date of AD 64 seems reasonable. At this time, Paul was still in prison in Rome and had just written the Prison Epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon).

The Theme and Purpose of This Letter

First Peter is valuable to us as a kind of handbook for pilgrims living in a foreign land. As believers we are sojourners (temporary resident aliens) in the world, a world that is passing away (1 John 2:17). Our true home is in heaven, toward which we are progressing (Phil. 3:20). That makes us pilgrims moving toward a new and better land. Here, we can expect trials and suffering. There, we anticipate participating in the glory of God’s Son (Rom. 8:15-18). Peter encourages us to see the trials in the red glow of the sufferings of Christ and in the radiant light of the glory of Christ. *Suffering* and *glory* are recurring themes in this letter.

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PETER

EXAM BOOKLET
AK '08 (2 UNITS) 1PET

STUDENT NAME (PLEASE PRINT)

ADDRESS

CITY, STATE, ZIP

COURSE GRADE: _____

INSTRUCTOR



Exam developed by Emmaus Correspondence School, founded in 1942.

A NOTE ON THE EXAMS

The exams are designed to check your knowledge of the course material and the Scriptures. After you have studied a chapter, review the exam questions for that lesson. If you have difficulty in answering the questions, re-read the material. If questions contain a Scripture reference, you may use your Bible to help you answer them. If your instructor has provided a single page Answer Sheet, record your answer on that sheet. This exam contains the following types of questions:

MULTIPLE CHOICE

You will be asked to write in the letter of the correct answer at the space on the right. Here is an example:

The color of grass is

- A. blue C. yellow
B. green D. orange

 B

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Questions headed this way are designed to help you express your ideas and feelings. You may freely state your own opinions in answer to such questions.

RETURNING THE EXAM

See the back of this exam booklet for instructions on returning your exam for grading.

DO NOT PHOTOCOPY THESE EXAM PAGES

First Printed 2008 (AK '08), 2 UNITS

Reprinted 2010 (AK '08), 2 UNITS

Reprinted 2010 (AK '08), 2 UNITS

Reprinted 2015 (AK '08), 2 UNITS

ISBN 978-1-59387-093-5

Code: 1PET

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Printed in the United States of America

7. The believers Peter was writing to were probably

- A. all Jews
- B. all Gentiles
- C. Jews and Gentiles
- D. all slaves

8. The estimated date that Peter wrote this letter is

- A. AD 55
- B. AD 64
- C. AD 67
- D. AD 70

9. In this, Peter's first letter, he pictures believers as

- A. slaves suffering under Roman taskmasters
- B. strangers living in a foreign land
- C. soldiers preparing for war
- D. members of a royal court

10. Two connected themes in this letter are

- A. church government and practice
- B. false teachers and how to identify them
- C. suffering and glory
- D. prophecy and the rapture

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Imagine yourself to be one of these displaced Christians in 1st century Asia Minor. What are you hoping this letter of Peter's is going to do for you?
