

# GOD'S AMAZING BOOK

THROUGH THE BIBLE, BOOK BY BOOK

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## WHEN TIMES GET TOUGH A Quick Look at the First General Epistle of 1 Peter <sup>1</sup>

FOCUS	SALVATION OF THE BELIEVER		SUBMISSION OF THE BELIEVER	SUFFERING OF THE BELIEVER			
REFERENCE	1:1	1:13	2:13	3:13	3:18	4:7	5:1-5:14
DIVISION	SALVATION OF THE BELIEVER	SANCTIFICATION OF THE BELIEVER	GOVERNMENT, BUSINESS, MARRIAGE, AND ALL OF LIFE	CONDUCT IN SUFFERING	CHRIST'S EXAMPLE OF SUFFERING	COMMANDS IN SUFFERING	MINISTER IN SUFFERING
TOPIC	BELIEF OF CHRISTIANS		BEHAVIOR OF CHRISTIANS	BUFFETING OF CHRISTIANS			
	HOLINESS		HARMONY	HUMILITY			
LOCATION	EITHER ROME OR BABYLON						
TIME	C. A.D. 63-64						

Source: NELSON'S COMPLETE BOOK OF BIBLE MAPS & CHARTS, 1 PETER

**Persecution can either cause you to grow or grumble in the Christian life.** It all depends on your response! In writing to Jewish believers struggling in the midst of persecution, Peter reminds them of their "roots." They have been born again to a living hope, and therefore both their character and conduct can be above reproach as they imitate the Holy One who called them. The fruit of that proven character will be actions rooted in submission: law-abiding citizens, obedient employees, submissive wives, loving husbands.<sup>2</sup>

When the city of Rome burned, the Romans believed that their emperor, Nero, had set the city on fire, probably because of his incredible lust to build. In order to build more, he had to destroy what already existed. The Romans were totally devastated. Their culture, in a sense, went down with the city. All the religious elements of their life were destroyed—their great temples, shrines, and even their household idols were burned up. This tragedy had great religious implications because it made them believe that their deities had been unable to deal with this conflagration and were also victims of it. The people were homeless and hopeless. Many had been killed. Their bitter resentment was severe, so Nero realized that he had to redirect the hostility. The emperor's chosen scapegoat was the Christians, who were already hated because they were associated with Jews, and because they were seen as being hostile to the Roman culture. Nero spread the word quickly that the Christians had set the fires. As a result, a vicious persecution against Christians began, and soon spread throughout the Roman Empire, touching places north of the Taurus mountains, like Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia,

### Fast Facts on 1 Peter

**Written by?** Peter

**Written to whom?** Christians who were scattered, persecuted, and maligned.

**Written when?** A.D. 63-64

**Written why?**

1. Hope in suffering
2. Holiness in living
3. Submission to authorities
4. Trust in God
5. Leadership in the Church

**Key Verse?** 1 Peter 2:21

<sup>1</sup> Heavily dependent upon Daniel Akin's handout for a local church on "1 Peter" [www.danielakin.com](http://www.danielakin.com)

<sup>2</sup> Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru the Bible* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1983), 469.

Asia, and Bithynia (1:1), and impacting the Christians, whom Peter calls “pilgrims.” These “pilgrims,” who were probably Gentiles, for the most part (1:14, 18; 2:9, 10; 4:3), possibly led to Christ by Paul and his associates, and established on Paul’s teachings. But they needed spiritual strengthening because of their sufferings. Thus the apostle Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote this epistle to strengthen them.<sup>3</sup>

### THINGS TO REMEMBER ABOUT 1 PETER<sup>4</sup>

1. Peter is one of only three original disciples used by God to write New Testament books or Epistles (see also: Matthew and John).
2. The suffering of Christ is spoken of in every chapter of 1 Peter.
3. In 1 Peter, the subject of suffering is mentioned over fifteen times.
4. 1 Peter has been called the “~ob” of the New Testament, as it deals with suffering and God’s sovereignty.
5. 1 Peter was probably written in the early stages of the great Christian persecution under Caesar Nero in Rome.
6. Peter is one of only two New Testament authors to refer to Jesus as a “lamb” in 1 Peter 1 :19 (John was the other; see John 1 :29, 36 and Revelation 5:6).
7. Peter seemed to have an appreciation and fondness for the word “precious,” In his two epistles, Peter tells us about seven “precious” things that we either possess or are, by God’s grace. In 1 Peter these are: salvation (1:7); Christ’s blood (1:19); God’s people (2:4); Christ Himself (2:7); inner Christian beauty (3:4). In 2 Peter these are: our faith (1:1) and God’s promises (1:4).

*Robert Lee said, “The portrait of Peter in the Gospels and his own writings are amazingly and gloriously different. In the former, Peter saw his Lord transfigured; in the latter, we see Peter transfigured by the boundless grace of God.” J. Allen Blair said, “1 Peter is a favorite book because of its practical approach to the needs of every believer... This little epistle provides a splendid source of peace and comfort for all God’s people who are perplexed and troubled.”*

### Life Lessons from 1 PETER<sup>5</sup>

1. You are expected to submit to governing authorities.
2. Your conduct should point unbelievers to Christ, especially those in your family.
3. You should not be surprised when persecution comes.
4. You can face persecution victoriously as Christ did if you rely on Christ for strength.

#### Suffering in Divine Perspective

Human Suffering	Divine Perspective
Various trials (1 Pet. 1:6).	Rejoice; they are temporary (1 Pet. 1:6).
Unjust authority (1 Pet. 2:18).	Silence evil men by doing good. Follow the example of Christ (1 Pet. 2:21).
Suffering for doing what is right (1 Pet. 3:14).	Be ready to give testimony of your faith (1 Pet. 3:15).
Suffering because of a determination to resist carnal desires (1 Pet. 4:1).	Give up carnal pursuits (1 Pet. 4:2).
Religious persecution (1 Pet. 4:12-14).	Be partakers in Christ’s sufferings (1 Pet. 4:13, 14).
Suffering as part of God’s refining fire for spiritual growth (1 Pet. 4:19).	Commit your life to Him; He is faithful (1 Pet. 4:19).
Suffering from the attack of Satan (1 Pet. 5:8).	Resist Satan; be steadfast in faith (1 Pet. 5:9).

**Story of Sharaf el-Din. An Egyptian Muslim by birth, Mr. el-Din converted to Christianity in 1983 after both he and his wife had visions of Jesus (a surprisingly frequent occurrence in Muslim countries), They left Egypt for Kenya in 1988 to search for employment and to avoid the increasing religious persecution they faced at home. Desperate for a job, Mr. el-Din legally returned to Egypt in 1994. But upon his return, his family did not hear from him for five months because he was immediately “detained.” A hearing was eventually held in which no charges were raised, yet he continued to be detained. After getting legal permission, his lawyer attempted to visit him in the prisons, but he couldn’t find him. The only reason given for his incarceration, informally, was that he converted to Christianity. He was suffering for his faith.<sup>6</sup>**

<sup>3</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 481.

<sup>4</sup> Jeff Lasseigne, *Highway 66* (Santa Ana, CA: Calvary Chapel Publishing, 2004), 185-187.

<sup>5</sup> Jim George, *The Bare Bones Bible Handbook*, pg. 269.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Dever, *Message of the New Testament*, 445.

**I. Author** - This letter makes a direct claim to have been written by the apostle Peter (1:1) with the help of Silvanus (5:12). Peter, the brother of Andrew and son of Jonah (Matt. 16:17), was a fisherman from Bethsaida on the Sea of Galilee. The name Peter (meaning “rock”) was given to him by Jesus (Mark 3:16; John 1:42). Generally it is believed that Peter held leadership in the circle of the twelve. He is always listed first in the lists of disciples in the New Testament (Matt. 10:2; Mark 3:16; Luke 6:14-16). Silvanus is almost certainly the same Silvanus (Silas) who served with Paul on the second missionary journey (Acts 15:40). The phrase “Silvanus” (5:12) may indicate that he did not simply write down Peter’s words, but put in his own words what Peter expressed to him. Peter then was the author of the letter, but Silvanus was the penman or secretary (amanuensis).

**EXTRA: The Man Called Peter**

- Was a fisherman by occupation
  - Was one of the first to be called to serve with Jesus
  - Was one of the inner group of three disciples, along with James and John
  - Was brash and impulsive in speech and actions
  - Denied Christ three times
  - Was restored by Christ to “feed” His sheep - His people
  - Preached the first sermon after the founding of the church
  - Had difficulty with receiving Gentiles into the church
  - Supplied John Mark with eyewitness accounts of the life of Jesus.
  - Wrote 1 and 2 Peter
  - Was, according to tradition, crucified upside down in Rome
- Peter was not always right, but he was never in doubt!**

**II. Date** - A.D. 63-64 would be the approximate date for the writing of this epistle. It was a time of suffering for many believers, and it is just prior to the intensive persecution by the Roman emperor Nero (A.D. 64-68) under whose hand, according to ancient traditions, Peter eventually suffered martyrdom (cf. John 21:18-19).

**III. Recipients** - Peter wrote for Christians in a wide area in the five Roman provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1:1). The recipients are referred to as “Pilgrims” or “Sojourners,” a term normally reserved for Jews who from the time of the fall of Jerusalem (to the Babylonians in 586 BC) were scattered into many countries. It appears that many of the initial readers of this letter were not Jews, and the term could be applied to the “new people of God” (2:4-10) who were scattered and awaiting their permanent heavenly home (see Phil. 3:20).

**IV. Place of Writing** - Peter wrote that he was in “Babylon” when he penned the letter (5:13). Three locations have been suggested for this “Babylon.” First, a Roman outpost in northern Egypt was named Babylon; but that place was too obscure, and there are no reasons to think that Peter was ever there. Second, ancient Babylon in Mesopotamia is a possibility; but it would be quite unlikely that Peter, Mark, and Silvanus were all at this rather small, distant place at the same time. Third, “Babylon” is an alias for Rome; perhaps even a code word for Rome. In times of persecution, writers exercised unusual care not to endanger Christians by identifying them. Peter, according to some traditions, followed James and Paul and died as a martyr near Rome about two years after he wrote this letter, thus he had written this epistle near the end of his life, probably while staying in the imperial city. He did not want the letter to be found and the church to be persecuted, so he may have hidden its location under the code word, “Babylon,” which aptly fit because of the city’s idolatry (cf. Rev. 17, 18).<sup>7</sup>

**V. Theme** - First Peter, while addressing many issues, focuses on the theme of “hope (and eventual “glory”) in the midst of suffering.” While unbelievers cannot accept or understand this paradox, believers,

**A Suggested Outline of 1 PETER (by Danny Akin)**

**I. Experience God’s grace by salvation 1:1 – 2:10**

1. Live in hope. 1:1-12
2. Live in holiness. 1:13-21
3. Live in Him. 1:22 – 2:10

**II. Experience God’s grace through submission 2:11 – 4:11**

1. Submit to authorities. 2:11-17
2. Submit to masters. 2:18-25
3. Submit in the home. 3:1-7
4. Submit in the church. 3:8-12
5. Submit to Christ. 3:13 – 4:11

**III. Experience God’s grace in suffering 4:12 – 5:11**

1. Glorify Christ’s name. 4:12-19
2. Serve Christ’s church. 5:1-4
3. Depend on Christ’s grace. 5:5-11
4. Enjoy Christ’s family. 5:12-14

<sup>7</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 481.

because they have received a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, can face fiery trials (4:12). Christ provides both the model and inspiration for responding to every suffering (2:21-24).

**KEY WORD – “Example”:** Greek *hupogrammos*—2:21—literally, “tracing tablet.” In biblical times, this term denoted tablets that contained the entire Greek alphabet. Students would practice tracing each letter of the alphabet on these tablets. When believers use the life of Jesus as their example, His life of suffering becomes their tracing tablet. Christians who trace the life of Jesus learn godliness and wisdom in the face of persecution.<sup>8</sup>

### **1 PETER 3: 19 – Does Peter support the view that a person can be saved after he dies?**<sup>9</sup>

**PROBLEM:** First Peter 3:19 says that, after His death, Christ “went and preached to the spirits in prison.” But the Bible also says that “it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). These two verses appear to teach mutually opposing positions.

**SOLUTION:** The Bible is clear that there is no second chance after death (cf. Heb. 9:27). The Book of Revelation records the Great White Throne Judgment in which those who are not found in the book of life are sent to the lake of fire (Rev. 20: 11-15). Luke informs us that, once a person dies, he goes either to heaven (Abraham’s bosom) or to hell and that there is a great gulf fixed “so that those who want to pass” from one to the other cannot (Luke 16:26). The whole urgency of responding to God in this life before we die gives further support to the fact that there is no hope beyond the grave (cf. John 3:36; 5:24).

There are other ways to understand this passage, without involving a second-chance at salvation after death. Some claim that it is not clear that the phrase “spirits in prison” even refers to human beings, arguing that nowhere else is such a phrase used of human beings in hell. They claim these spirits are fallen angels, since the “Sons of God” (fallen angels, see Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7) were “disobedient ... in the days of Noah” (1 Peter 3:20; cf. Gen. 6:1-4). Peter may be referring to this in 2 Peter 2:4, where he mentions the angels sinning immediately before he refers to the Flood (v. 5). *In response, it is argued that angels cannot marry (Matt. 22:30), and they certainly could not intermarry with human beings, since angels, being spirits, have no reproductive organs.*

Another interpretation is that this refers to Christ’s announcement to departed spirits of the triumph of His resurrection, declaring to them the victory He had achieved by His death and resurrection, as pointed out in the previous verse (see 1 Peter 3:18). Some suggest that Jesus offered no hope of salvation to these “spirits in prison.” They point to the fact that the text does not say Christ evangelized them, but simply that He proclaimed the victory of His resurrection to them. They insist that there is nothing stated in this passage about preaching the Gospel to people in hell. In response to this view, others note that in the very next chapter Peter, apparently extending this subject, does say “the Gospel was preached also to those who are dead” (see comments on 1 Peter 4:6). This view fits the context here, is in accord with the teaching of other verses (cf. Eph. 4:8; Col. 2:15), and avoids the major problems of the other view.

### **1 PETER 4:6 – Is the Gospel preached to people after they die?**<sup>10</sup>

**PROBLEM:** Peter says that “the Gospel was preached also to those who are dead.” This appears to claim that people have a chance to be saved after they die. But this runs into conflict with Hebrews 9:27, which insists that “it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.”

**SOLUTION:** In response it should be noted, first, that **there is no hope held out anywhere in Scripture for salvation after death.** Death is final, and there are only two destinies – heaven and hell, between which there is a great gulf that no one can pass over (see comments on 1 Peter 3: 19). So, whatever preaching to the “dead” may mean, it does not imply that one can be saved after he dies.

**Second, this is an unclear passage, subject to many interpretations, and no doctrine should be based on an ambiguous passage like this. The difficult texts should be interpreted in the light of the clear ones and not the reverse.**

**Third, there are other possible interpretations of this passage that do not conflict with the teaching of the rest of Scripture. (1) For example, it is possible that it refers to those who are now dead who heard the Gospel while they were alive. In favor of this is cited the fact that the Gospel “was preached” (in the past) to those who “are dead” (now, in the present). (2)**

Or, some believe this might not be a reference to human beings, but to the “spirits in prison” (angels) of 1 Peter 3: 19 (cf. 2 Peter 2:4 and Gen. 6:2). (3) *Still others claim that, although the dead suffer the destruction of their flesh (1 Peter 4:6), yet they still live with God by virtue of what Christ did through the Gospel (namely, His death and resurrection). This victorious message was announced by Christ Himself to the spirit world after His resurrection (cf. 1 Peter 3:18).*

<sup>8</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 480.

<sup>9</sup> Norman Geisler, *When Critics Ask*, 1 Peter.

<sup>10</sup> Norman Geisler, *When Critics Ask*, 1 Peter.