

Chapter Summary: 1 Peter

The apostle Peter knew that he needed to write a letter to encourage certain believers who were encountering opposition and persecution from their unbelieving neighbors. Such difficult experiences were also impacting these believers' perspective of God.

In the early 60s AD, Peter was living in Rome, which he calls "Babylon," alluding to the ancient city that oppressed God's people in the Old Testament. He had learned about the difficult situation that the followers of Jesus were facing in another part of the Roman Empire: the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (all in Asia Minor, which is modern-day Turkey). Peter now writes to those believers, largely made up of Gentiles, encouraging them in the face of suffering. He also gives them a clear sense of identity as God's chosen people, and he urges them to continue on the path of holy living.

Peter begins by reminding the believers of the great hope they now have in Christ. God's new world is being kept in heaven for them, waiting for the day it will come down and be revealed as their inheritance.

Next Peter marvels at the transformation their faith in Jesus has brought about. "God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors," he says, so now "you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light." Alluding to the Old Testament, Peter tells them, "Once you had no identity as a people; now you are God's people." Then, using language that further echoed descriptions of Israel, he declares, "You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession."

However, their new identity has created a number of earthly problems. Peter says, "Your former friends are surprised when you no longer plunge into the flood of wild and destructive things they do. So they slander you." The slander may have included accusations that the believers were disloyal to the emperor because of their allegiance to Jesus. Peter tells them not to worry about these charges and insults but rather to remain devoted to Christ while continuing to be good citizens. They are to keep their consciences clear, to honor the emperor, and to worship Christ. That's all the defense they should need.

When it seems like Peter is wrapping up his letter with a doxology ("All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen."), he continues on with a slightly different theme. Perhaps he received additional news about these believers before Silas (a friend who probably served as scribe and messenger) left to deliver it.

"Dear friends," Peter continues, "don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you." These new believers may not have expected their faith in Jesus to lead so directly to troubles and insults. Perhaps they were even disappointed in God for the way things were turning out. Peter tells them that they should actually "be very glad, for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering." This recalls Peter's language in an earlier part of the letter: "Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in His steps." This should remind us of the message of Mark's Gospel, most likely built from Peter's account. There we saw that Jesus Himself pioneered the way of suffering and service and taught His disciples that they were to follow that path as well.

With this additional treatment on suffering, Peter concludes his letter. After repeating his doxology ("All power to Him forever! Amen."), he offers one last word of encouragement: "My purpose in writing is to encourage you and assure you that what you are experiencing is truly part of God's grace for you. Stand firm in this grace."