

1 P E T E R

A VERSE BY VERSE STUDY THROUGH PETER'S EPISTLE

SESSION OBJECTIVE: 1 PETER 1:1

To learn about Peter, the content of his first epistle, and its historical context.

This Land Is Not Your Land

Growing up, I was always into music. I began playing bass violin in the 5th grade, and then bassoon in the 7th grade. At age 15 I started playing drums, and joined the jazz band my senior year of high school. Before I learned instruments, however, I was in choir. I loved to sing, although I never thought I was that good at it. I remember as a little boy, one of the first songs we learned was *The Land is Your Land* by Woody Guthrie. There was a great sense of pride in singing it, and connecting with the reality that everyone in America has a right to a sense of ownership as an American. Knowing you that you have citizenship in a land that brings with it certain rights is a gift that we as Americans can often take for granted. To live in a land that does not belong to you and is, in fact, hostile towards you, is challenging.

1 Peter in a lot of ways explores this challenging circumstance. Peter calls his audience, “the elect exiles” (ESV), “those who reside as aliens” (NASB), or “the strangers scattered” (KJV) in verse 1, and the rest of the letter details how we as exiles should live in a foreign land, and answers some important questions. Why are we exiles? What kind of conduct should we exhibit towards one another? What kind of conduct should we exhibit towards outsiders? Peter, in many ways, details with the question of spiritual citizenship, and all of the rights, privileges, and challenges we face as members of God’s family. As we study this letter, consider the things Peter says in light of this context, and think deeply about how well you live this out. Many things in this letter will challenge us, and praise God for that. Through the challenge of God’s Word comes the opportunity for growth, so, “prepare your minds for action” (1 Pet. 1:13).

The Author

Verse 1 begins by telling us, before anything else, who wrote this letter. “Peter” (1 Pet. 1:1). Peter is featured in all three so-called synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), as well as the Gospel According to John. He is also seen in the Acts of the Apostles, and mentioned in Galatians and 1 Corinthians (by the name Cephas) by Paul. He is a central figure in the New Testament and one of Jesus’ “inner three” disciples to witness Jesus’ transfiguration (along with James and John).

BACKGROUND

Peter’s original name was Simon, meaning “hearer.” He was the son of a man named Jonas (Matt. 16:17; Jn. 1:42), and was raised in the tradition and skill of his father, a fisherman. Peter had one brother named Andrew, and both they and James and John, sons of Zebedee, were partners. Peter lived in a house that belonged either to himself or his mother-in-law in Capernaum, and it was likely a rather spacious home, as evidenced by the number of individuals who came to either stay with him and his family or to witness the miracles and preaching of Jesus. The evidence of a mother-in-law shows that Peter was also married. The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:5, “Don’t we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord’s brothers and Cephas?” While it isn’t something mentioned often, it is an interesting aspect of Peter’s life to take into account.

Peter, as well as Andrew, John, and James were all originally disciples of John the Baptist, and he was like between the ages of 30 and 40 when he received his call to follow Jesus. Peter is often seen as rash and forward, and almost overly self-confident. He is usually the representative voice of the disciples when they have a question for Jesus, and in every list of the apostle in the New Testament, Peter is named first. Along with Paul, Peter is seen as one of the more instrumental and authoritative apostles, often traveling around to various churches to give instruction and correction.

Peter is responsible for at least two books in the New Testament (1 Peter and 2 Peter), but was likely instrumental in a third as well. The Gospel which we know today as Mark was historically referred to as the Memoirs of Peter. John Mark was a protegee under Peter, and since Mark did not personally walk with Jesus during His earthly ministry, someone had to have relayed those details to him. Historical tradition, once again, indicates that it was Peter who recounted the Gospel’s details, and mark penned them.

The time and manner of his death is not totally certain, but church tradition does give some account. According to the early fathers, he suffered death around the same time that Paul did under the Emperor Nero. Origen, an instrumental church father, wrote that Peter felt himself to be unworthy of death by crucifixion, the same manner of death as the Lord, and requested to be instead crucified upside down.

An Apostle

Peter identifies himself as more than a mere disciple of Jesus: “an apostle of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:1). Apostolic authority was the highest human authority in the early church. The early church, “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). Apostles fulfilled the New Testament equivalence of an Old Testament prophet, as they were able to perform miracles on demand as signs from God, and they spoke on behalf of God such that to contradict or disobey an apostle was to disobey God Himself. This speaks to why Paul also appeals to His apostleship when giving commands to the church in Corinth: “The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost

patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works” (2 Cor. 12:12). Both Paul and Peter identify themselves as an apostle in almost every epistle written by them.

Peter’s title as an apostle carried serious weight. For a church to receive a letter written by an apostle (these letters would have been circulated around through the various churches to be read) was a big deal. The pastor of each local body would gather the elders and members to an assembly and read the letter aloud. As you read and study this letter, remind yourself of the weight that it carries. It is not only from the hand of an apostle, but the words contained here are breathed out by God Himself (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Exiles

The letter is addressed to, “the elect exiles of the Dispersion” (1 Pet. 1:1). The verbiage of exiles in dispersion echoes the Old Testament. Below is a brief breakdown of some key words.

ELECT

Peter refers to them as, “elect.” The Greek word here, ἐκλεκτός (eklektos), is a word that means, “the called out or chosen out ones.” In other words, the people of God in the church of Jesus Christ are there because God has chosen them to be there. The concept of God’s people being chosen goes all the way back to the people of Israel, who are often referred to as chosen (Deut. 4:37; 7:6-8). This foreshadows what Peter will later indicate, that the church is, “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession” (1 Pet. 2:9).

EXILES

They are not only elect, but elect strangers or exiles. The word here for exiles in the Greek is παρεπίδημος (parepidēmos), and it means, “one not residing in his own country.” Some have argued that Peter calls them exiles because they no longer live in their actual homeland, but that misses the point of 1 Peter as a whole, and ignores the previous word. That they are “elect” exiles indicates the reason for *why* they are exiles. They are strangers or foreigners in the land they live because they have been elected to a way of life that is contrary to cultural norm. As a believer in Christ, we are told: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2). Christians are not to participate in worldly activities. We do not place our hope in earthly leaders to meet our needs. We do not engage in many of the social practices that are common to our culture, and as such, we are like stranger or foreigners.

This is also a play on the Old Testament Jews living in exile for their sin. We are not exiles because we are being punished, to be clear. But the imagery here evokes what Christians should look like in the world today. As Jews living in a foreign land didn’t know the language or understand the cultural norms and thus didn’t participate in them, we as Christians should look similar in the world today. Whatever country you live in, it is not where your citizenship truly resides. It’s not wrong to participate as a citizen in your country, as Peter and Paul both did so as well, but it is not to be your chief interest either. This world and these kingdoms will one day fall, but the kingdom of God will last forever. As Daniel 2:44 says, “And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.”

DISPERSION

Lastly, the audience is a group of elect exiles *of the dispersion*. Again, this captures the same verbiage used to describe Jews living outside of Palestine, usually as a result of their sin. However, as was the case in the aforementioned terms, Peter is not making a direct correlation, but rather giving a word picture of what

Christians are like. We are like Jews living in dispersion, in that we are scattered. Historically, Christians were scattered after great persecution came to the church in Jerusalem. Many ended up in Antioch, and others in other places. This began the fulfillment of Jesus' words in Acts 1:8, that, "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the world." That can't happen if Christians aren't scattered.

The places mentioned in Peter's letter cover the area of about 300,000 miles, which is essentially all of Turkey. Whether Peter intended the letter to reach beyond these boundaries is unclear, but what is clear is that the audience would have almost certainly been primarily Gentile. This is important because much of what Peter is going to say in this letter would anticipate a Jewish audience, which means the Peter sees some continuity between Israel and the church.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read 1 Peter 1:1. Who is the author of this letter, and what is his significance in the New Testament?

2. Read 1 Peter 1:1. What title does Peter write under? Why does this matter?

Day Two

1. Read 1 Peter 1:1. To whom is this letter written?

2. What is the significance of the descriptor, "elect?"

Day Three

1. What is the significance of the descriptor, "exiles?"

2. What does it mean that they are exiles *of the dispersion*?

Day Four

1. What do you hope to gain personally from studying 1 Peter? Have you ever studied it before?

2. Do you see yourself as primarily a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, or primarily a citizen of the country you currently reside in?
-
-

Week 1 Discussion: What Matters Most?

1 Peter as a whole addresses the difficulty of living as, “elect exiles of the dispersion.” As Christians called by God into a life that is contrary to the world we live in, we are constantly faced with decisions to be counter-cultural, which in turn puts us at odds with the world. We face criticism and sometimes judgment as a result of our faith. Talk as a group about the values you have as a Christian, and how you live out these values in the world today.

1. Icebreaker: Have you ever had to make a decision that put you at odds with a group of non-believing friends or family members? What was it, and how did it go?
2. What are some things that Christians should abstain from because they are contrary to their call to live a life set apart?
3. What are some things that Christians usually abstain from but are not necessarily at odds with their call to live a life set apart?
4. How does your faith call you to live contrary to your country’s cultural norms?
5. Should we as Christians *expect* non-Christian Americans (or citizens of your country if you do not live in America) to abide by the same convictions we have? Why or why not?
6. Will the world ever be harmonious towards our Christian convictions? Why or why not?

Takeaways:

1. Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, authored 1 Peter.
2. The audience of 1 Peter is primarily Gentile, and seen as strangers in the land they live in because they are called by God and set apart for His purposes.

PRAYER REQUESTS: