

# First Epistle of Peter - Introduction

by Arno Clemens Gaebelein

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*The sermon introduces the First Epistle of Peter, emphasizing its authenticity, themes of suffering and glory, and practical applications for believers.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 16:18, Acts 2:9, 1 Peter 2:4, 1 Peter 5:1, 2 Peter 1:21

**Topics:** "Biblical Inspiration", "Suffering And Glory"

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## Description

Arno Clemens Gaebelein delves into the authenticity of the Epistle of Peter, addressing the objections raised by critics and emphasizing the role of inspiration in confirming Peter as the author. He provides insights into the life and service of Simon Peter, highlighting his impulsive yet faithful character and his significant role in the early church. Gaebelein explores the purpose and message of 1 Peter, focusing on the themes of suffering and glory, and stresses the importance of believers, both Jewish and Gentile, embracing the practical exhortations and comfort found in the Epistle for their spiritual growth and endurance in trials.

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## Transcript

### Introduction

The genuineness of this Epistle is confirmed by the most ancient sources. Polycarp, who was personally acquainted with the Apostle John, cites the Epistle of Peter. Papias of Hierapolis made use of the Epistle likewise. This was about the middle of the second century. Two quotations of Peter's Epistle are found in a very ancient source, "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles," a kind of manual going back to 100 A.D. All the other documents of the first and second centuries show that the Epistle was unanimously known and accepted as Peter's.

The critics have not left it unattacked. We do not need to quote the different theories advanced by Cludius, Eichhorn (the man who coined the phrase "higher criticism"), De Wette, Bauer, Davidson, Pfleiderer, Hamack, and others. The main objection seems to be that the expressions used in this Epistle are too much like the thoughts and expressions of the Apostle Paul as used in his Epistles, so, as it is assumed, Peter could not have written it. This theory was expanded into the hypothesis that some one must have written it who had spent considerable time with Paul, so that he adopted Pauline ideas and phrases; John Mark has been suggested by some to be that person. Critics have pointed out many parallels with different Pauline Epistles. "In considering these parallels, allowance must be made for ideas and phraseology, hymns, prayers, confessions of faith, and other matter, which were the common property of the primitive

Church; and would introduce a degree of similarity into the writings of different authors. But much of the thought and language of First Peter belongs to what was characteristic of the teaching of Paul and his followers as distinct from that of the Palestinian or Jewish churches. The parallels in any case, show a dependence upon Pauline teaching.

"But we may go further. There is a great variety of opinion as to the precise character and extent of the dependence of First Peter on the writings of Paul. It has been suggested that it is just possible that Paul himself was the author of First Peter, the passages in which Peter's name occurs being later insertions; and again that this Epistle and Ephesians were the work of one author. But that dependence, especially on Romans, is very widely recognized" (New Century Bible).

All these objections, speculations, and theories denying the Petrine authorship are answered by the fact of inspiration. Peter no doubt knew and read the Epistles of Paul; in fact he speaks of them in his second letter (2 Peter 3:15-16). But that does not mean that he copied and reproduced the statements found in some of Paul's Epistles; nor does it mean that he depended on Paul when he wrote his Epistle. The Holy Spirit who guided Paul's pen guided also the hand of Peter; all is the direct work of the Holy Spirit.

If Peter uses some of the great truths found in the Epistles of Paul it was because the Spirit of God desired to have them restated. If we examine these parallels closely we discover that they cover the most essential truths of Christianity and are used for practical exhortations. Those whom Peter addressed needed these truths and the practical application. On the other hand there are many internal evidences which prove that none but Peter wrote this Epistle. It has been pointed out that there is a similarity between Peter's statements in the book of Acts and in this first Epistle. Compare Acts 4:11; 2:32, 3:15 with 1 Peter 2:7; 1:3, 4, 8 and 5:1. He also uses a peculiar word for the cross. It is the word "tree" (the Greek word xulon). See Acts 5:30; 10:39; 1 Peter 2:24. Furthermore, the writer speaks of having been an eyewitness of the Lord's sufferings (5:1). He describes these sufferings, how He was reviled and reviled not, how He suffered and threatened not. And Peter was an eyewitness of all this. Nor is it without significance that in this Epistle alone the Lord Jesus Christ is called "the chief Shepherd." On the shores of Lake Tiberias the risen Lord restored Simon Peter to service and told him "shepherd My sheep," hence Peter speaks of the Lord as the chief Shepherd, and also exhorts the elders to be faithful in feeding the flock of God. As it is with all other critical objections to the traditional belief as to the inspired authorship of the different Bible books, the objections against the Petrine authorship of this Epistle are wholly worthless. Peter wrote this Epistle. The date cannot be definitely settled, but must be placed between 62 and 65 A.D.

## SIMON PETER

A brief review of the life and service of the Apostle Peter will be helpful in understanding his writings. He was born at Bethsaida in Galilee, from which Philip came also (John 1:44, 45). His name was Simon (or Simeon, Acts 15:14) and his father's name was Jonas. He had a brother by name of Andrew, and the three, the father, Simon and Andrew were fishermen at Capernaum. There Simon Peter had his home, as he was a married man (Matthew 8:14; 1 Cor. 9:5). His brother Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist and when he pointed out the Lord Jesus as the Lamb of God, Andrew followed Him. Andrew brought Peter to the Lord (John 1:35-43).

When the Lord beheld him He revealed His omniscience, for He said: "Thou art Simon the son of Jona, thou shalt be called Cephas," which is the Aramaic word for stone. When later Peter, in answer to the question "Whom say ye that I am?" said: "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God," the Lord Jesus

said to him, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:17-18). The Greek word *petros* means a small rock, or piece of a rock; the Greek for rock is *petra*, the word our Lord used when He designated the foundation of the Church. It is not Peter, but Christ Himself, who is the rock. In his Epistle Peter contradicts by the Spirit of God the miserable invention that he is the rock upon which the Church is built, as claimed by Rome and even by Protestant expositors. (See 1 Peter 2:4-8). The Gospel records, as well as the Epistle to the Galatians, give us a good description of his peculiar character. He was impulsive, forward and self confident, yet he was true, loving and faithful. Before he denied the Lord, the Lord Jesus announced Peter's great failure and assured His disciple of His prayer, when Satan would sift him as wheat. In connection with this our Lord gave him a commission. "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." His denial, his bitter repentance, his restoration at the lake of Tiberias, the still greater commission to shepherd the sheep and the lambs of the flock of God, are so well known, that we need not to enlarge on them.

The Lord also committed to him the "keys of the kingdom of the heavens," not to Heaven, nor to the Church, but to the kingdom of the heavens, that is to that which is now on earth. The book of Acts gives us the history of the use of the keys. He used the keys in connection with the Jews on the day of Pentecost, when he preached to them and, in preaching, opened the door to those who heard him; then he used the keys once more in the household of Cornelius (Acts 10) and then by preaching he opened the door to the Gentiles. This is what our Lord meant.

Here is another significant fact, in writing his Epistles Peter never mentioned this commission of the keys. According to Rome and other ritualistic churches he should have stated in the beginning of his Epistle that he is the supreme holder of the keys of the kingdom of heaven. But not Peter was to be the great apostle to the Gentiles; the Lord called Paul to this position. Peter is the prominent actor in the beginning of the book of Acts, when the gospel was preached "to the Jew first." After Jerusalem rejected that gospel and the apostle to the Gentiles had been called, Paul becomes the prominent figure in Acts. Peter is mentioned only once more in connection with the council held in Jerusalem (Acts 15). In Galatians chapter 2 his Jewish character in withdrawing from the Gentile believers after he fellowshipped with them is rebuked by Paul. In that chapter we also read that Peter with James and John were to minister to those of the circumcision, that is the Jews; while Paul and Barnabas were to go to the Gentiles.

After this incident we hear nothing more about Peter. The Spirit of God might have given us a complete account of what he did, where he went, but all is passed over in silence. The omniscient Spirit saw what would come in Christendom. He knew that ritualism would give to Peter a place of supremacy in the body of Christ which does not belong to him at all. Therefore Peter's life and service are passed over by the Holy Spirit and we hear nothing more about him in the inspired records. But we hear from him in the two Epistles which bear his name and which he wrote.

But while Scripture is silent, tradition is not. It is claimed by the historian Eusebius that he was Bishop of Antioch, the church which he founded. But the latter statement is contradicted by Acts 11:19-21 and the former is equally incorrect. Other ancient sources declare that he was very active in Asia Minor. That he must have ministered widely may be gained from 1 Corinthians 9:5: "Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?" But the entire ministry he rendered is not revealed.

Another tradition claims that he settled in Rome to oppose the Samaritan sorcerer Simon Magus (Acts 8). Justin Martyr in his writings states that Simon Magus was worshipped in Rome as a god on account of his

magical powers. On account of it they erected a statue on an island in the River Tiber inscribed "Simoni Deo Sancto." Actually there was found in the year 1574 in the Tiber a stone with the inscription "Semoni Sanco Deo Fidio Sacrumi" i.e. "to the god Semo Sancus," the Sabine Hercules, which is definite proof that Justin Martyr was mistaken. Upon this rests the legend that Peter went to Rome to oppose Simon Magus. It is claimed that Peter was Bishop in Rome for 25 years and founded what is called "the Holy See," which later developed into the abominable papacy with its lies. Peter never saw Rome. As we shall show later in this introduction, there is sufficient Scriptural authority to contradict this legend. Another legend states that he was martyred in Rome, where the Lord appeared to him, when Peter had left the city to escape death. That he should die the martyr's death had been announced by our Lord, as well as the manner of his death by crucifixion. Nobody knows where that death took place. When he wrote his second Epistle it was a brief time before his death (2 Peter 1:14); but that Epistle was not written from Rome.

Did Peter Write from Babylon or from Rome ?

At the close of the Epistle we read the following salutation: "The church that is in Babylon, elect together with you, saluteth you, and so does Marcus my son." "The church that is" does not appear in the original text; it has, therefore, been explained that Peter meant his wife, though it appears more probable that he meant the other elect ones who were with him in Babylon. The fact is established that when he wrote this Epistle Peter was in Babylon. But does this mean the literal Babylon on the banks of the Euphrates or the mystical Babylon, which is Rome ? Roman Catholic writers claim that it means the city of Rome, and a large number of Protestant commentators side with this view. They claim that he was in Rome with Mark. They say that Babylon has the same meaning as the word has in the book of Revelation, that is, not the literal Babylon, but Rome.

There is no definite proof that Rome was universally called " Babylon " before John received it in his Patmos vision; it is claimed that the persecution under Nero led Christians to call Rome by the name of Babylon ; but it is more likely that the name Babylon was widely used for Rome after John had written the Apocalypse. The Apocalypse was written some 25 or 30 years after Peter had written his Epistle, how, then could he have used this mystical name for Rome ? Furthermore, a mystical name is out of keeping in an Epistle. It would be the only instance in the entire epistolary testimony where a place is camouflaged in this way. The use of a mystical name in an Epistle appears strained. It therefore must be the literal Babylon in Mesopotamia. And why should this not be? We read in the second chapter of Acts that among those who were in Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit came to earth were "Parthians, Medes, Elamites and dwellers in Mesopotamia." They heard Peter's testimony and some of them must have been converted. Many Jews dwelt there, and while in 41 A.D. Caligula instituted a persecution against the Jews in Babylon and many left, there was still a large company of them in the fast decaying city.

But the most conclusive evidence against Babylon, meaning Rome, is the complete silence of the Apostle Paul about Peter being in Rome. Paul sent his Epistle to the Roman Church in the year 58 A.D. In that Epistle he greets many believers who were in Rome. If Peter had been there, why did he not mention him also? He went to Rome as a prisoner in the year 61, but there is not a word about meeting Peter in Rome. Finally, when Paul penned his very last Epistle from Rome he makes the significant statement: "Only Luke is with me" (2 Tim. 4:11). This silence about Peter in the Pauline Epistle can only be explained by the fact that Peter was not in Rome at all.

Addressed to Believers in the Dispersion

The Epistle is addressed to the sojourners in the dispersion, that is, to Jewish believers who were scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, provinces in the northeastern part of Asia Minor. Many assemblies had been founded there and there were many believing Jews. They probably had their own gatherings, keeping aloof from the assemblies formed by believing Gentiles. They were the remnant and yet in having believed they were members of the body of Christ.

## THE PURPOSE AND MESSAGE OF THE EPISTLE

When Peter wrote this Epistle he fulfilled the request of the Lord, when he told them "when thou art converted strengthen thy brethren." They needed strengthening and comfort for they were passing through all kinds of persecutions; their faith was being severely tested. As believers they were pilgrims and strangers on earth, their portion and calling was different from the unbelieving Jews about them, among whom they suffered. The Lord Jesus Christ who suffered in their behalf is repeatedly presented as a pattern for them in their persecutions, and blessed exhortations are linked with the Person and holy character of our Lord. The Epistle is not doctrinal, though the great doctrines of Christianity are in view throughout the Epistle. It is, like the Epistle of James, a practical Epistle, abounding in exhortations and references to Old Testament history suited to believing Jews in their trials. The keynote is "Suffering and Glory. The words suffering and suffer occur fifteen times and the word glory ten times.

The same error has been taught by some extremists in Biblical interpretation which we have pointed out already in the introduction to the Epistle of James, namely, that it has a Jewish character and does not belong to the Epistles in which the Church and the heavenly calling are revealed, and therefore the Church should not consider it. This is a most vital mistake. The first Epistle of Peter has an important message also for all believers at all times; to pass it over and not to heed its blessed message, its comfort and exhortations would mean a very serious loss. A one-sided Bible reading produces a one-sided Christian character and a one-sided Christian service. And there are only too many of such in the Church today.

### The Division of First Peter

As stated in the introduction the keynote of the Epistle is "Suffering and Glory." The end of their pilgrimage, when all suffering ends, will be salvation and the possession of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled and that fadeth not away. This salvation was the object of inquiry and searching by their own prophets. The Spirit of Christ who was in them testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow. So they as being His and identified with Him would also have suffering which in due time will be followed by glory. The glory comes with His revelation, His appearing, when He comes again.

We divide the Epistle into five sections, but somewhat different from the five chapters into which the Epistle is divided in our Bibles.

I. THE SUFFERING OF BELIEVERS AND EXHORTATION TO HOLY LIVING (1:1-21)

II. THE BLESSINGS AND PRIVILEGES OF ALL BELIEVERS (1:22-2:10)

III. CHRIST THE PATTERN FOR HIS SAINTS (2:11-3:9)

IV. THE COMFORT IN THE MIDST OF TRIALS AND SUFFERING (3:10-4)

V. EXHORTATIONS CONCERNING SERVICE AND CONFLICT (5)

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