

1 PETER: *The Suffering Church*

Hard Times and Holy Living

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ is the stated author (1:1). There are many similarities between this letter and Peter's sermons recorded in Acts 1:20; 2:23; 4:5; 10:42. His amanuensis (secretary) is Silas 5:12.

DATE: A. D. 63 since Peter was martyred about 67 under Nero's persecution.

PLACE: "Babylon" (5:13) is the stated place of writing. Two views are held as to the location of "Babylon" in this letter. (1) C. C. Ryrie holds that Babylon is a symbolic name for Rome in order to avoid trouble with the Roman authorities. Peter was in Rome during the last decade of his life and wrote this epistle about A. D. 63, just before the outbreak of Nero's persecution in A. D. 64. His death occurred in 67. (2) Another view is that there is no proof that Peter spent his last days in Rome, and Christians did not call Rome Babylon until after the book of Revelation was written (c. A. D. 85-95). While there is no evidence to prove Peter was there, it is true that many Jews still lived in the vicinity of old Babylon on the Euphrates, and it is not impossible that Peter wrote from Babylon while visiting Jewish Christians there. The advantage of this view is that the statement is taken in its plain meaning (R. B. Jones). It seems best to regard "Babylon" (5:12) as a reference to Rome.

RECIPIENTS: These believers were being persecuted simply because of their faith in Christ (4:12). They are described as "strangers, scattered," "sojourners of the dispersion" (1:1; cf. Acts 8:2-4). They are foreign residents, i.e. strangers living in a foreign land. They are probably a mixture of Jews and Gentiles, many of them natives of Judah, but predominantly Gentile believers who had been scattered throughout the world (1:14; 2:9-10; 4:3-4). Peter's use of Old Testament quotations would seem to indicate a Jewish audience. However, the mention of idolatry would point to Gentiles, since no Jew would ever commit idolatry since the Babylonian Captivity in 585 B.C. Their persecution is typical of anyone who lives in a pagan and hostile society. It took the form of slander, riots, local police action and social ostracism.

PURPOSE: Peter wrote to explain the suffering of the Christian and to encourage their faith in Christ (2:11-12; 4:12-13). He encourages the recipients of this letter to rejoice and live above the chances, changes and circumstances in life. Peter seeks to change their focus from the difficulties at hand to the glory to come. Hope in the midst of suffering saturates this letter.

THEME: "the true grace of God" in time of persecution (5:12).

KEY WORDS: suffer, holy, hope, glory

"PREACHED TO THE SPIRITS IN PRISON" (3:18-22): There are three dominant views on this difficult passage: (1) Some understand this to mean that Christ, between His death and resurrection, descended into Hades and offered to those who lived before Noah (v. 20) a second chance for salvation, a doctrine that is without scriptural support. (2) Others say that it was simply an announcement of His victory over sin to those in Hades without offering a second chance. (3) Most likely this is a reference to the preincarnate Christ's preaching through Noah to those who, because they rejected that message, are now spirits in prison" (C. C. Ryrie).

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Wil is a graduate of William Carey College, B. A.; New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Th. M.; and Azusa Pacific University, M. A. He has pastored in Panama, Ecuador and the U. S, and served for over 20 years as missionary in Ecuador and Honduras. He had a daily expository Bible teaching ministry head in over 100 countries for ten years. He continues to seek opportunities to be personally involved in world missions. Wil and his wife Ann have three grown daughters. He currently serves as a Baptist pastor and teaches seminary extension courses in Honduras.

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