

ALIEN FAITH

RADICAL LIVING IN THE HOPE OF CHRIST
::THE FIRST LETTER OF PETER::

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PASTOR MICHAEL BREZNAU

LIFE AS AN ALIEN.
How are we to live when...
the environment is hostile,
people don't like us, our faith
is criticized, our Savior is
mocked, and persecution is
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supposed to fight or hide?
Shout in protest or be quiet?
Run for safety or take risks?

SUFFERING FOR THE SAKE OF CHRIST IN THE HOPE OF GLORY

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Author: Who Wrote It?

The Apostle Peter: *Petros* – meaning “Stone” or “Rock.”

Both external and internal evidence clearly points to Peter as the author of this letter. Louis Barbieri writes, “There is no New Testament letter that has any earlier or stronger external attestation to its authorship than 1 Peter.”¹ Irenaeus, Polycarp, Clement and other early church leaders all point to Peter as the author and the apostle's name is inscribed in the greeting.

Numerous allusions to the teachings of Jesus specifically addressed to Peter are throughout the book. For instance, the instruction to elders in 5:2: “shepherd the flock of God among you” reflects Christ's final words with Peter in John 21:15-17. Therefore, the apostle Peter, close disciple of Jesus the Christ, was most certainly the author of this small but powerful letter.

Date: When Did He Write It?

Peter most likely penned his first letter

shortly after Nero (Roman Emperor from 54 to 68 A.D.) began official persecution of Christians: approximately 64-65 A.D. Historical tradition holds that Peter died in Rome somewhere between 67 and 68 A.D.

Recipients: Who Received It?

Peter's first letter was a circular letter that was sent to various groups of Christians scattered around what is now modern day Turkey, across the northern shore of the Mediterranean Sea: Pontus, Galatia, Cappodocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

While Peter's Jewish background is evidenced in this letter through numerous Old Testament references and allusions, the audience was most likely not entirely Jewish. The assemblies of Christians scattered across the *diaspora* were comprised of both Jews, who had been forced off their property and out of their families for converting to Christianity, and Gentiles who also now faced cultural rejection and the beginnings of persecution from the Roman government.

Purpose: Why Was It Written?

Even the strongest faith may be shaken under the tough fire of social rejection and persecution. The fledgling groups of Christ-followers in the *diaspora* were living as geographical aliens (away from their homeland) but also as spiritual aliens – they were not accepted in the pagan religious environment of the Greco-Roman world. The emperor, Nero, had just begun official persecution toward Christians and soon the fire of hatred would spread from Rome to the entire empire.

In the face of serious trial, fear might rise. News of fellow Christians being murdered for their faith was beginning to spread. Doubts about the decision to follow Christ could set in. Basic necessities for life might be scarce.

Therefore, the Holy Spirit inspired Peter to write so that these scattered and persecuted believers would know *how to live through suffering for the sake of Christ in the hope of glory.*



FEEL LIKE AN ALIEN - OUT OF PLACE?

You and I are not the only ones to encounter the feeling that we're out of place. The apostle Peter wrote his first letter to early followers of Jesus Christ who were scattered as resident “aliens” throughout the northern shoreline of the Mediterranean Sea. Their environment was seriously hostile, but their mission was clear and their hope was real. And what they needed to hear is precisely what we must grip onto, as we live as God's people in an anti-God world.

Nero: Roman Emperor, 54-68 A.D.

CULTURAL BACKGROUND

They were weeping.

Have you been driven to tears because of the world's rejection of Christianity? Is the opposition becoming hard to face? Is sorrow beginning to overwhelm your joy in Christ?

They were rejected.

Do you feel like you just don't fit into the norms of society? Are you facing increased rejection because of who you are and what you believe?

They were poor.

Have you lost a raise or promotion because of your faith in Christ? Have you lost out on a family inheritance because they reject your Christian faith? How are we to live... when we are rejected not accepted, when we are poor not rich, when we are persecuted not applauded, when we are hurt and not protected?

They were afraid.

Does the rise of persecution against Christians frighten you? Have you ever been deeply afraid to share your faith? How are we to live when... the environment is hostile, people don't like us, our faith is criticized, our Savior is mocked, and persecution is on the rise? Are we supposed to fight or hide? Shout in protest or be quiet? Run for safety or take risks?

OVERVIEW OUTLINE

- I. Greetings to the Chosen (1:1-2)
- II. Chosen for a Living Hope (1:3-2:10)
 - A. Rejoicing in the Living Hope (1:3-9)
 - B. Rejoicing in the Anticipated Grace (1:10-12)
 - C. Radical Action in the Living Hope (1:13-1:21)
 - D. Practicing the Living Hope as Living Stones (1:22-2:10)
- III. Chosen for a New Mission (2:11-4:19)
 - A. Shout out Christ...without Words (2:11-12)
 - B. Radical Respect (2:13-20)
 - C. Following Christ's Radical Path (2:21-25)
 - D. Relationships...the Jesus Way (3:1-12)
 - E. Showing Your Hope (3:13-18)
 - F. God's Rescue Plan (3:18-22)
 - G. A Radical Passion (4:1-11)
 - H. Life Under Fire (4:12-19)
- IV. Life Under Christ...in the Hope of Christ (5:1-14)



THE PLOT

The Message of First Peter

The new birth in Jesus Christ results in a new and living hope (1:1-12). This hope of an eternal and forever-secure inheritance as God's chosen people, in turn, strengthens one's faith amid rising persecution (1:13-2:10) and displays the Gospel of grace to the persecutors (2:11-20). A living, assured hope of an eternal home with God in Christ also changes the way we live in the present (2:25-4:19).

How we view the end will change how we live today.

Relationships in marriage, family, and within the community are guided by the example of Christ's humility and sacrifice *in suffering* before glory (2:25-3:12). This radical living in the hope of Christ changes how we respond to those who reject us (3:13-22) and the way we spend our time and resources (4:1-11). Even when life under the fire heightens in hostility, our living hope guides us to continue rejoicing in God (4:12-19). Finally, our hope in the glory of Christ's return determines how church elders and younger men should respond to one another, and guides all believers to live with humility, sobriety, vigilance, and love (5:1-14).

*When we live right now with eternity in view, sorrow **because** of suffering is replaced with joy **in** the suffering. And this is precisely how God's mission continues to go forward in a hostile world*

NOTES FOR TODAY

"Radical decisions are the founding fathers of my life, shall I now waver?" Missionary C.T. Studd

For the Book Geeks:

¹ Louis Barbieri "1 Peter", in *The Moody Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), p. 1957.

³ Thomas Schreiner. *1 Peter*. New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003.

² Edwin H. Blum. "1 Peter:" in *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12, edited by Frank E. Gaebelin. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981.

⁴ John F. Woolvord, Roy B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: an Exposition of the Scriptures*. New Testament ed. Wheaton, IL: Victor