

BOOK-A-MONTH CLUB

~ April ~

1 and 2 Peter with Martin Staelens

Week 1 (April 1-3): Understanding the background to 1 and 2 Peter

Background:

1 Peter

Most scholars are in agreement that the Apostle Peter wrote the letter of 1 Peter.

Peter first sent this letter to believers living in the northern regions of Asia Minor (1:1).

The locations of these Christians as well as allusions in the epistle indicate that they were mainly Gentiles but also Jews (see 1:14; 2:10). Peter stated his reason for writing, namely, to encourage his readers, who were facing persecution for their faith, to stand firm (5:12). Evidently this persecution was widespread among his readers. Local enemies of the gospel were not the only people responsible for it. When Paul traveled around the Roman Empire preaching the gospel, some churches he planted experienced persecution from the unsaved in their communities, but others did not. However 1 Peter reflects persecution of the Christians throughout northern Asia Minor. This condition prevailed after Nero blamed the Christians for burning Rome in July of A.D. 64. While persecution seems to have been widespread, it may not have been official yet.

Peter died in the mid 60s and spent the last decade of his life in Rome according to reliable tradition. Many interpreters have regarded his reference to Babylon (5:13) as a reference to Rome that Peter described as Babylon to highlight its paganism. In view of all this information it seems likely that Peter wrote this epistle from Rome about A.D. 64. Theologically this epistle is eschatological (dealing with the end times). Along with its eschatological focus there is much emphasis on holiness (personal, social, and communal), hope, salvation, community, relationship to the world, the Trinity, and especially suffering.

2 Peter

This epistle claims that the Apostle Peter wrote it (1:1). It also claims to follow a former letter by Peter (3:1) that appears to be a reference to 1 Peter, though Peter may have been referring to a letter we no longer have. The author's reference to the fact that Jesus had predicted a certain kind of death for him (1:14) ties in with Jesus' statement to Peter recorded in John 21:18.

The earliest external testimony (outside Scripture) to Peter being the author comes from the third century. Because the writings of the church fathers contain few references to Peter being the author of 2 Peter, critics who look for reasons to reject the authority of Scripture have targeted this book for attack. Ironically in this letter Peter warned his readers of heretics who departed from the teaching of the apostles and the Old Testament prophets, which is the very thing these modern critics do. However not all who reject Peter being the author are false teachers. However regardless of the external evidence, there is strong internal testimony to the fact that Peter wrote the book. This includes similar styles to 1 Peter, similar vocabulary compared with Peter's sermons in Acts, and the specific statements already mentioned (i.e., 1:1, 14; 3:1). In addition, the writer claimed to have witnessed Jesus' transfiguration (1:16-18) and to have received information about his own death from Jesus (1:13-14; John 21:18). The audience of the letter was primarily Gentile but also Jewish Christians living in northern Asia Minor (1 Pet. 1:1). Peter's reference to his imminent departure from this life (1:13-15) suggests that he wrote it just before he suffered martyrdom. The writings of church fathers place Peter's death at A.D. 67-68 in Rome. Early church tradition also says Peter spent the last decade of his life in Rome. The purpose of 2 Peter is to call Christians to spiritual growth so that they can combat apostasy as they look forward to the Lord's return.

The above background on 1 and 2 Peter was taken from:

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Week 2 (April 4-10): 1 Peter Chapters 1-2

1 Peter 1: 1-2. Peter is addressing the Christians in various regions, calling them “strangers in the world” and ones in whom the Spirit of God has been at work sanctifying them. How have you seen the Spirit at work in you, making you more like Jesus, and less like the people of the world – those that do not know God?

1 Peter 1: 3-5. Peter talks about the hope we have as Christians. Think about all the things we can put our hope in (our money, jobs, positions, reputations, family, spouses, friends, etc.). Are any of these unshakeable or imperishable? Contrast those with the hope God gives us in Christ. In what does your greatest hope lie?

1 Peter 1: 6-9. Peter says that we do experience grief when those trials come. But those trials come in order to refine our faith. When those trials come, how do you maintain your joy through those times? Do you notice any correlation between the times you do not sense that joy or you feel it in abundance, and your focus on the “goal of our faith, the salvation of our souls”?

1 Peter 1: 10-16. Verse 13 says [because of the gospel message] prepare your minds for action. What ways can you do this? See 2 Corinth 10:5 and Phil 4:8. What happens if you are not “self-controlled”? Even when we try as hard as we can to live a godly life, our “hope [is] fully on the grace to be given [us]”, never in our own works.

1 Peter 1: 17-25. This grace is not cheap – it came from the redemption made possible only by the “precious blood of Christ”. And even though it is by grace that we will be saved, God will still look at what we have done in this life. Knowing that, how can we live as “strangers” in this world in “reverent fear” of God? How can you develop that deep and sincere love for your brothers (and sisters) in Christ? Verse 22 (and the beginning of chapter 2) has a clue. How does the Word of God tie into that?

1 Peter 2: 1-3. What steps do you need to take to purge your life of these things? Can others help you in this?

1 Peter 2: 4-8. “You are being built”. Are you allowing God to build and mold you into the person He wants you to be? In what ways have you resisted these changes? You can see many ways in which the world rejects Christ and His principles. Is He the “cornerstone” of your life? Is He the anchor that holds all the different sides of your house together? What do you need to turn over to Him today?

1 Peter 2: 9-12. We often spend time asking God for things and do not spend enough time simply praising Him for calling us out of darkness. Make that a priority in your life this week. Do you have any non-Christian friends? In what ways are you allowing God’s light to shine to those non-Christians around you? Is there something you need to do to allow that light to shine brighter?

1 Peter 2: 13-17. When we submit to authorities over us, and show them proper respect and honor, how does that help us, especially if they are non-Christians? Have you seen the testimony of Christ impacted when you have not given a particular authority submission and respect? Is it possible to still be respectful and yet disagree with an authority in situations where they have asked you to do something contrary to God’s will? Look at Acts 22:30-23:11

1 Peter 2: 18-25. None of us have been slaves or had to go through the exact sufferings that Christ went through. However most of us have had to interact with difficult people - whether it was an employer or some other person in authority over us. How do you train yourself to act like Jesus during these difficult times? Look at verses 23 and 25. Does it help to remember that you too were once lost and needed a savior and so does that difficult person? Or knowing that the Judge of all mankind knows your struggles and what you are enduring? How did Jesus make it through a difficult time (think of the Garden of Gethsemane)?

Week 3 (April 11-17): 1 Peter Chapters 3-4

1 Peter 3: 1-6. Wives, is it easy to follow these steps? Do you have Godly sisters in Christ from whom you can gain encouragement and advice? Husbands, how are you making it easy for your wives to follow these steps?

1 Peter 3: 7. Husbands, are you considerate with your wife and treat her with respect? Do you have Godly brothers in Christ to whom you can be accountable?

1 Peter 3: 8-14. The list of things to do and not do in verses 8 and 9 can be hard. We almost need to remind ourselves of these things at the beginning of each day. But doing these things comes with a blessing. Look at the various blessings referenced in verses 8-14 if we try and live the way God instructs us to. Does the promise of the blessings help encourage you in these areas?

1 Peter 3: 15-16. Are you prepared to tell people the difference God has made in your life? If not, take this week to write this down so you can be ready. Remember to share this testimony with gentleness and respect, and check to make sure you are addressing areas of sin in your life. This does not mean that you are sinless, but that you are not allowing sin to take root and fester unchecked in some area of your life.

1 Peter 3: 17-22. This is one of the biggest distinctions of our faith as compared to that of other religions the world, or that “faith” of atheists. Our hope and faith is in a person who was put to death on a cross and rose again and was put in a position of authority over all powers (earthly and spiritual). In this faith, we can’t bring anything to the table to help our cause. We have to rely completely on God’s saving grace. He loves and cares for us so much, this message ought to occupy our thoughts every day. How can you grow in your understanding of this truth and how you might articulate it in love to others?

1 Peter 4: 1-6. How do you “suffer in your body” to do away with sin? Is it a matter of not letting sin have control, but you taking control away from sin? How can you accomplish that? Verses 7-11 of chapter 4 may help. Will we ever do away with sin completely in our lives here on earth?

1 Peter 4: 7-11. Being clear minded (not polluting our minds with junk), practicing self control, praying, loving each other deeply, being hospitable, serving others, knowing and speaking God’s Word, relying on God’s strength. All of these things can lead to God being glorified in our life, and us gaining control of sin. Like a muscle, we have to continually work at these things to grow in these areas. What can you do in your life to grow in these areas?

1 Peter 4: 12-19. Sometimes our suffering is brought about by our own sin. There is no honor in this. However when our suffering comes because of our faith, or because of things outside of our control, it is possible for us to have joy even in the midst of those painful trials. It is often difficult in those sufferings to have joy, but how can you grow in this regard? Look back on ways that God has used painful experiences to allow you to grow in your faith. Look at Rom 8:28 and 1 Peter 5:10. You can probably also see ways that God has used sufferings brought on by your own sin to help you grow in areas in which you were weak. This in and of itself is reason to have joy. God does not abandon us – whether the suffering was brought on by our own failures or by things outside of our control.

Week 4 (April 18-24): 1 Peter Chapter 5 and 2 Peter Chapter 1

1 Peter 5: 1-4. Though this passage is addressed to elders, it really can apply to any of us that are in positions of authority over others (parents over kids, supervisors over employees, etc.) The passage is encouraging us in the following areas: to serve joyfully and eagerly; not to be greedy; to be eager to serve; not misusing our power; and being examples to those under us. How are you doing in these areas?

1 Peter 5: 5. This verse, though addressed to young men, could also apply to those of us in submission to others. The admonishment is to be humble. This can be difficult at times. What things cause you to be prideful and how can you resist those things in the future?

1 Peter 5: 6-11. We know times of suffering will come. Here Peter is preparing us for those times. He says to practice humility, bring our troubles to God, be self-controlled and alert to sin in our life that constantly wants to creep in. Resist that sin and stand firm in your faith. The promise is that if we do these things, God will restore us and make us strong, firm, and steadfast. Look at Micah 6:8. What similarities do you see to 1 Peter 5:6-11?

1 Peter 5: 12-14. Peter confirms that what he has written in this letter is the “true grace of God”. He admonishes us to “stand fast in it”. What ways are you tempted NOT to stand fast in it?

2 Peter 1: 1-4. Look at what these verses say about the benefits of having a knowledge of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. We will receive grace and peace in abundance; we will have everything we need for life and godliness; and we receive His promises that allow us to live a godly life and escape the corruption in the world. Are you giving sufficient time to gaining knowledge of Him?

2 Peter 1: 5-11. These verses continue with the blessings of growing in different areas (faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, etc.) As these qualities increase, it will help to keep us from becoming ineffective and unproductive; we will have more assurance of our salvation; we will stand strong; and finally we will be well received into heaven. How can you grow in each of these areas?

2 Peter 1: 12-15. Peter emphasizes that we need to not just learn these truths once. We have to continue to study them and be reminded to follow them so that we remember these truths. How are you doing that?

2 Peter 1: 16-21. In this section of scripture, Peter is confirming the majesty and authority of Jesus Christ. Peter was an eyewitness during the transfiguration of Christ (see Matt 17:1-9) and Peter also references the prophecies of Christ that proved Christ was who He said He was. Peter says we would “do well to pay attention to it”. How do validations of Christ and His words help you in your walk and how can you use those to help encourage others?

Week 5 (April 25-30): 2 Peter Chapters 2-3

2 Peter 2: 1-3. Peter says there will be false teachers among us. How can you protect yourself from them? See Matt 10:16 and Acts 17:11

2 Peter 2: 4-9. From this passage we can learn that God's righteous judgment is indeed coming. He is not blind to the trials that His people undergo but will, at the appropriate time, remove them from that trial. This can spur us on to continue walking in our faith, and not grow weary, even when it becomes difficult. It can also help us to remember that there are many in the world not prepared for the day of judgment and who need to hear the truth of the Gospel. Who can you share the truth with this week? Pray that God would give you the insight on how to do this and to whom you can share.

2 Peter 2: 10-19. Peter seems to be saying that there really is no depth to the depravity that man can become a slave to when they turn away from all things holy. This is a good time to do a self-evaluation. Is there anything that is your master other than God Himself?

2 Peter 2: 20-22. What do you think Peter means by saying they would have been better off not knowing the way of righteousness than to know it and turn their back on it? See John 9: 39-41, John 15: 22, and Rom 2: 12-16.

2 Peter 3: 1-7. Peter begins this section of scripture with a reminder as to why he wrote his letters. He wants people to remember the words of the prophets and of Christ. This is important because when we are around scoffers and doubters of God, it is possible we can be led astray ourselves if our faith is weak. Peter reminds us of what will happen to those who do not trust in the Lord. Do you find it easy for others to cause you to doubt God? If so, try to take Peter's advice and spend more time in the Word.

2 Peter 3: 8-9. Almost as if Peter wants to keep us from turning our backs on those who do not know God, Peter reminds us that it is God's desire that ALL would be saved and that He is patient. Just because the ungodly are not immediately destroyed, that does not mean that God does not notice their behavior. He is simply wanting them to repent and turn to Him, and His love for them is shown in His patience with them. After all, He had patience with each of us. How can we be a part of that process of winning others to Christ and at the same time to guard ourselves?

2 Peter 3: 10-14. Peter reminds us that the earth, as we know it, will one day be completely burned up. Knowing this, we need to be prepared by living the kind of life He has called us to. Do you have your eyes set on the new heaven and the new earth and does this help you to live a righteous life?

2 Peter 3: 15-18. Peter concludes his letter with another reminder that there will be people who distort the Word of God and we need to continue to watch out for this and grow in the grace of God and in our knowledge of Him and His word. It is interesting that Peter emphasizes that we need to grow both in grace and knowledge. If we emphasize one and not the other, we will not have a good balance in our life. How are you doing in this regard?