



## INTRODUCTION TO 1 PETER

### CALL TO STUDY 1 PETER

One of the basic doctrines of the Christian faith is salvation by grace alone. The New Testament consistently testifies to that truth, as seen in the following verses: *But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved* (Acts 15:11); *...Justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus* (Romans 3:24); *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God* (Ephesians 2:8); *Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life* (Titus 3:5-7).

God's saving grace is usually the first thing a new believer is taught to appreciate with humble gratitude. However, Christians must also be acutely aware that God's grace extends far beyond the blessing of salvation and is meant to pervade every area of our lives. It is only by God's rich and infinite grace that Christians have the ability to meet the trials and tribulations of everyday living. The grace which saved you is also the grace which must carry you through, day by day, moment by moment, as you seek to live a life which is pleasing to God.

In 1 Peter, we are reminded of the great saving power of God's grace so that we may look back upon our lives and see all that God has done for us in His awesome work of salvation. But the central thrust of the letter is to encourage and exhort us, as believers, to grasp hold of that same grace to carry us through our lives in this present world. As you examine your own life, are you living in total reliance upon the grace of God by living in submission to His Word, exercising obedience to His commands, and resting in His will in this turbulent world?

As vulnerable human beings, it is important that we be reminded often of God's grace — of what it has accomplished for us in the past, what it is able to do for us in the present, and the glory it promises for the future. All believers need such encouragement in their lives. 1 Peter will give you a strong encouragement in God's grace by reminding you lovingly, but firmly, of what God expects of His children. Will you commit

the next nine weeks to this study and allow God to speak to you through His Word? He will honor that commitment with spiritual growth and understanding as you surrender your time and energy to Him daily in the study and application of His Word. *Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need* (Hebrews 4:16).

### CONTEXT OF 1 PETER

Almost everyone enjoys receiving a personal letter in the mail. It is especially exciting to receive a letter from someone you know and love — and who also loves you. 1 Peter is a letter which was written for Christians who were living in a hostile world. In this sense, 1 Peter was written to you and has very personal meaning for your life. However, it will be much more exciting to read and study 1 Peter if you first get to know the writer and the reasons which led him to write this letter. A brief introduction to the context of the letter will also help you to understand the content of the letter more clearly.

#### I. Writer

It is generally accepted that both 1 and 2 Peter were written by the apostle Peter, the only Peter in the New Testament. Both letters bear his name in their introductions.

##### A. Peter, the man

###### 1. Vocation

Before he met Jesus, Peter was a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee with his father, Jonas, (Matthew 16:17; John 1:42; 21:15-17) and his brother, Andrew, who introduced him to Jesus (John 1:40-41). They were business partners with James and John, the sons of Zebedee (Luke 5:10). We know that Peter was married, because Jesus healed his mother-in-law (Mark 1:30). The family's hometown was Bethsaida of Galilee (John 1:44), convenient to fishing on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee.

###### 2. Education

In Acts 4:13, it is stated that the religious rulers of Israel perceived Peter (and also John) to be uneducated and untrained men. This is not to say that they had not received the normal education of every young Jewish

boy. Rather, it most likely refers to the fact that Peter and John had no rabbinical training. Therefore, it was amazing to the rulers that Peter preached with such authority, power, and knowledge of the Scriptures.

### 3. Name

Peter's given name was Simon, which was a common Greek name. He was also sometimes called by the Hebrew equivalent which is Simeon (Acts 15:14 NASB)). At their very first meeting, Jesus changed Simon's name to Cephas (John 1:42) which is Aramaic for the Greek Peter (Mark 3:16). Thus, Simon, meaning the reed, was changed to Peter, meaning the rock or stone.

### 4. Personality

Before Jesus' death and resurrection, Peter was more of a reed than a rock, sometimes standing tall, proud, and strong, but often wavering in the wind. Frequently he seemed to be more a man of impulse and daring than a man of faith. He was so daring that he stepped out of his boat to walk on the water to go to Jesus, yet he had so little faith that he sank and Jesus had to save him from drowning (Matthew 14:29-30). He dared to speak up and confess faith in Jesus as *the Christ, the Son of the living God* (Matthew 16:16), but shortly afterward Jesus had to rebuke him for being an offense to Him and not being mindful of the things of God (Matthew 16:23). Peter cut off a man's ear in a daring act to defend his Lord (John 18:10), but shortly afterward he denied that he had ever met Jesus (John 18:17,25 & 27). When he wasn't acting impulsively, he was often speaking without thinking, appearing boastful or foolish. See Matthew 16:22; 17:4; 26:33, 35; John 13:8 and 37. Peter's words and actions were often foolish failures. Yet no one felt the weight of his own failures more than Peter himself. After denying three times that he knew Jesus, Peter went out and wept bitterly (Luke 22:62).

Henrietta Mears, in What The Bible is All About, notes that the personality of Peter in the Gospels is amazingly different from that of Peter the writer of two epistles. She writes, "In the Gospels we see Peter, the impulsive, restless soul, sometimes fearless but again a coward, even going so far as to deny his Lord with a curse! In His own epistles we see him patient, restful, and loving, with a courage purified and strengthened by the indwelling Spirit. This is a wonderful illustration of the transforming work of God in a human life."

Perhaps you can relate to Peter with his many inconsistencies and failures. One thing which draws many to read and appreciate Peter's letters is knowing about and understanding in a personal way his human imperfection and weaknesses. It is encouraging to see

the dramatic change in Peter's character and to know that God does change lives. There is no job too large for God. With Him no person is impossible. As you commit to the study of Peter's letters, will you allow Him to work on your character and make you into the man or woman He desires you to be?

## B. Peter, the apostle

### 1. Peter's call

Before becoming disciples of Jesus, Peter and his brother Andrew had probably been followers of John the Baptist (John 1:35-42). However, when Jesus called Peter to catch men, he, his brother, and business partners James and John, *forsook all and followed Him* (Luke 5:10-11). It was shortly after this that Jesus chose twelve of His disciples to be with Him, and that He might send them out to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons (Mark 3:14-15). It is interesting to note that in all four passages where the twelve apostles are listed, Peter's name is always first — Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-18; Luke 6:14-16; Acts 1:13-14. Perhaps this is because Peter, as an aggressive, impulsive and outspoken man, became a natural leader of the group and also its spokesman (see Matthew 16:16-20 and John 6:66-69).

Peter was one of a select group from the twelve. Jesus took only Peter, James, and John with Him on special occasions such as the raising of Jairus' daughter (Luke 8:51), the Mount of Transfiguration (Mark 9:2), and the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:33). Peter was also one of only four apostles (with James, John, and Andrew) to whom Jesus spoke privately about signs concerning coming tribulation and the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem (Mark 13:1-4). It was Peter, along with John, whom Jesus appointed to prepare the Passover meal for the night of the Last Supper. It was Peter whom the angel mentioned by name in telling the women at the tomb to go and tell the disciples that Jesus had risen (Mark 16:7).

### 2. Peter's confession

Peter was the first of the apostles to openly confess faith in Christ. There are three important confessions of faith which Peter made. Luke 5:8 records that he fell down before Jesus saying, *Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!* John 6:68-69 gives Peter's reply when Jesus asked the twelve if they desired to desert Him as some of the disciples had done. His answer was, *Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.* Matthew 16:16 records Peter's great personal confession that Jesus is, *The Christ, the Son of the living God.*

### 3. Peter's commission

Jesus' commission to Peter was to *strengthen your brethren* (Luke 22:32) and *tend My sheep* (John 21:16). Clearly, Christ designated a leadership role for Peter after His ascension into heaven.

### 4. Fulfilling the commission

The record of Peter's public ministry is found in the Book of Acts. The first sign of his leadership and preaching ability is found in Acts 1:15-22, soon after Jesus' ascension, at a meeting of about one hundred and twenty of the disciples. His first public sermon, given on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, is recorded in Acts 2:14-38. The fact that three thousand souls were saved that day attests to the spiritual power which enabled him. Other sermons by Peter are recorded in Acts 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 10:34-43; 11:5-18 and 15:7-11.

In addition to preaching the gospel message, Peter was empowered by the Holy Spirit for a vital healing ministry. Many people turned to the Lord after witnessing the apostles' miracles of healing. Some of these healings are recorded in Acts 3:1-9; 5:12-16; 9:32-35.

Peter's ministry included trials and suffering. He was arrested and thrown in prison for preaching the gospel message (Acts 4:1-3; 5:17-18 and 12:1-5), threatened by the Jewish religious rulers (Acts 4:21; 5:33 and 40), harassed (Acts 12:1), beaten (Acts 5:40), and one of his closest friends was put to death (Acts 12:2). He also faced opposition from a group of legalistic believers who insisted that all Christian converts should be circumcised (Acts 11:2; 15:1; Galatians 2:12).

Except for the record of his appearance at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), the account of Peter's public ministry ends with Acts 12:17 where we are told that he departed from Jerusalem and went to another place. We do not know the location of that place.

#### C. Peter, the elder

Even though the Book of Acts is silent concerning Peter's ministry after the Jerusalem Council, other New Testament references give some insight into his later life. From Galatians 2:7-9, it is evident that he had an evangelistic ministry to the Jews after the conversion of Paul. Also, Galatians 2:11-21 reveals that Peter visited the church at Antioch (in Syria) where he had an encounter with the apostle, Paul.

Because 1 Peter is addressed to believers living in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, it is likely that Peter had visited these areas, ministering to both Jews and Gentiles.

Many scholars believe that Peter went to Rome soon after Paul's release from his first imprisonment there (around 62 A.D.). If so, Peter's two epistles would most likely have been written from Rome. Since 1 Peter 5:13 states that he was writing from Babylon, those who hold to Rome as the place of writing take Babylon as a symbolic reference. Merrill Tenney in his New Testament Survey, conjectures that "Babylon is a mystic name for Rome, by which Christians applied to it all the evil connotations that had been historically associated with the Babylon on the Euphrates, and by which they could vent their feelings without being detected." If 1 Peter 5:13 refers to literal Babylon, there are two possibilities: either Babylon on the Euphrates in Mesopotamia where a small colony of Jewish Christians had settled, or Babylon on the Nile, a city of Egypt which was not much more than a military outpost. In any case, the place of writing is far less important than the content of Peter's letters.

Peter's letters are an integral and continuing result of his later years of ministry. 1 Peter was probably written soon after the outbreak of persecution of Christians by the emperor Nero in Rome. Mistreatment of believers soon spread into the provinces of Asia. The year was around A.D. 65. 2 Peter was written a short time later as Peter faced the imminence of his death, probably in A.D. 66 or 67.

#### D. Peter's death in A.D. 67

The early church writers, Clement of Rome and Origen, both indicate that Peter was martyred by Nero. Origen adds that Peter was crucified with his head downward, at his own request, believing himself unworthy to die in the same manner as Christ.

## II. Recipients of the Letter

Peter wrote to Christians who had been scattered by persecutions into the Roman provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia in northern Asia Minor. From the record in the Book of Acts, the apostle Paul had not evangelized these areas on his missionary journeys, so perhaps Peter had ministered there sometime after the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15. We know the recipients of the letter were believers because Peter referred to them as the *elect* (1 Peter 1:2), and in addressing the elders, he referred to himself as a *fellow elder* (1 Peter 5:2). These Christians were suffering for their faith, going through trials which threatened to become even more intense (1 Peter 4:12).

The time was during the reign of the cruel emperor, Nero, a man who had his own mother put to death to please his mistress. In A.D. 64, a fire raged through

the city of Rome which was said to have been started by Nero. Tradition has it that he watched the fiery destruction while sitting in a high tower playing his lyre, and chanting verses on the destruction of Troy. Later, Nero placed blame for the fire on the Christians and had many put to death. From that point on, the persecution intensified to the point that many early Christians believed Nero to be the Antichrist. It was also under Nero that Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 67. The recipients of Peter's letter lived in this atmosphere of evil and destruction.

### III. Reasons for Writing

In love, Peter penned a letter to remind the suffering Christians of the grace which had been bestowed upon them by God through the Lord Jesus Christ. He reminded them that this grace was not just a past experience which had no power for present day living. He reminded them that the same grace through which they had been saved would lift them up and carry them through their daily trials and tribulations and eventually result in the most glorious of all glories, the salvation of their souls at the appearing of the Lord Jesus.

In love, Peter called his readers to stand firm in God's glorious grace and by it to live the holy lives to which they had been called.

The reminder and the call are also for us today. We may not live under the threat of fiery persecutions for our faith. We may not be subjected to the neurotic whims of an evil emperor. But we live in the midst of a world which is ruled by the same adversary which confronted the first century Christians (see 1 Peter 5:8). Peter's message of God's glorious grace is needed to remind us daily of our commitment to Christ and His way of life. Peter's message of grace will uplift us and keep us standing firm for Him in the midst of Satan's deadly battle for our souls.

### CONTENT OF THE LETTER

1 Peter is a very practical letter. In it, Peter exhorts his readers to live exemplary Christian lives in the face of suffering. He does this by laying a solid ground of Christian truth upon which to firmly stand. Consequently, the letter overflows with valuable truth for living.

The truth presented is based upon the good news of salvation by the grace of God. The doctrine of salvation

is clearly stated and explained in the first chapter of the letter. The remainder of the letter emphasizes practical, holy living in every situation and in every relationship. Suffering is to be expected by Christians because we are aliens in a hostile society. The proper reaction to suffering is patience (1 Peter 2:20), joy (1 Peter 4:13), and steadfast faith (1 Peter 5:9). The right kind of behavior in every situation will be a witness to those who oppose us (1 Peter 2:12) and will even silence them (1 Peter 2:15). It may even win them to Christ (1 Peter 3:1). Right behavior includes submissiveness (1 Peter 2:13 - 3:12), love toward other believers (1 Peter 1:22), tenderness and courtesy (1 Peter 3:8), and humility (1 Peter 5:5, 6, 8).

As can be seen from the following outline, 1 Peter begins with an explanation of grace and what it means in a Christian's life to be saved by grace. This is followed by an exhortation to live by grace. The fact that it is a very practical letter makes 1 Peter precious to the hearts of those who desire to live their daily lives in accordance with God's perfect will and wisdom. A careful study of this letter should make you thankful for the privilege of being God's chosen man or woman. It should also arm you with wisdom and instill in you the desire to live up to your great calling!

### OUTLINE OF 1 PETER

- I. Saved by Grace - 1 Peter 1:1-2:10**
  - A. A Living Hope - 1:1-12**
  - B. A Holy Response - 1:13-2:10**
- II. Stand Firm in God's Grace - 2:11- 5:14**
  - A. Strive for Excellent Behavior - 2:11-3:12**
  - B. Suffer for Righteousness Sake - 3:13-4:19**
  - C. Stand Humbly and Soberly - 5:1-14**

### Application

1. Have you heard the good news of salvation by God's grace through Jesus Christ? If you have not, will you speak to your discussion leader or teaching leader so you might begin this study with the proper knowledge and right relationship with God? You may also ask your discussion leader for a "Confidence Letter" which explains how to know for sure if you have been *born again to a living hope* (1 Peter 1:3 NASB).
2. As you begin this study, will you ask God to open your mind and heart to the life-changing truths He has for you in 1 Peter? Will you commit to make time daily to read and study the Bible and apply what you are learning to your daily life?