

# 1 Peter - Background and Overview

## PETER'S EXPERIENCES WITH JESUS CHRIST

Christ called Peter and chose him for a special role, even before Peter was ready for it. This is an important lesson of Peter's life. He was humbled by his experiences in the presence of the Son of God. He learnt that shepherds lead by humbly following Christ's example, not because of any personal ability. If we can learn this lesson, we are well on the way to appreciating the import of Peter's life.

**Matt 16:13-18** When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, **Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.** And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and **upon this rock I will build my ecclesia.**

**Peter the Rock: Mt 10:2; 17:1.** The meaning of Peter's name forms an important background to his epistle. Also the fact that he learnt of the "living God": **Mk 12:27; Acts 2:32-36; 10:38-40; 1 Pet 1:3.**

**Matt 16:21-26** From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and **suffer many things** of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, **Get thee behind me, Satan:** thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, **let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.** For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. **For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?**

Peter did not initially appreciate that Christ had to suffer before entering into glory. Consider Jesus' words in **Lk 24:25-27,44-46.** This is one of the key messages of Peter's first epistle. Here in **Mt 16:26** Jesus is alluding to a fundamental principle from the book of **Daniel.** The principles of Daniel are also an important background.

**Peter's Denial: Mt 26:31-75; Mk 14:29-72; Lk 22:24-62; Jn 13:31-38; Jn 18:10-27.** Peter learnt by bitter experience what it means to be a disciple of Christ. In **Lk 22:61-62** it records extra detail about Christ's response that is not given in the other gospels. Peter learnt not to put trust in self but to lean on God's strength. Compare **Jn 18:19** with **1 Pet 3:15** and **Jn 18:23** with **1 Pet 2:19-24.** Jesus went to great lengths to help Peter understand that he was in need of conversion: **Lk 22:31-32.** Jesus quotes from Zechariah to warn the disciples what was coming. Compare **Mt 26:31** with **Zech 13:7.** Zechariah often speaks of shepherds and sheep, as Peter does.

**The Resurrected Christ appears to Peter:** Key Scripture is **Jn 21.**

**John 21:15-19** So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, **lovest thou me more than these?** He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, **Feed my lambs.** He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, **lovest thou me?** He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, **Feed my sheep.** He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, **lovest thou me?** Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, **Lovest thou me?** And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, **Feed my sheep.**

## TIME AND CONTEXT OF WRITING

Peter writes from Babylon: **1 Pet 5:13.** Some believe this is Babylon on the Euphrates. Others believe this is Rome, Spiritual Babylon (as in **Rev 17:5;18:1**). A number of Jewish writings show that Jews often referred to Rome as "Babylon". It does appear that Peter died in Rome. Also, John Mark came with Timothy to Rome in about AD66: **2 Tim 4:11.** He would have had to come a long way in a short time if this epistle was speaking about literal Babylon. Whatever the case, reference to Babylon is to alert us to the many similarities to life in ancient Babylon, particularly revealed by Daniel.

Peter's letter often speaks of suffering and trial: **1:6-7; 2:19-21; 3:14; 4:1,12-14; 5:9.** This places his epistle around AD64-67 at the time of Nero's persecution. The great fire of Rome in AD64 destroyed many valued temple areas of the city. To divert suspicion from himself on starting the fire, he blamed Christ's followers. Believers were subjected to horrific tortures – sewed in wild animal skins and set on by dogs, set alight on poles at his garden parties, and nailed on crosses. Christianity was outlawed. Believers were an easy target, unable to strike back and with little popular support. It is believed that Nero had a number of Jews in his court who may have influenced him. His second wife was also a Jewess.

## THE MAIN THEME OF THE EPISTLE

**Suffering: 1 Pet 2:19,20,21,23; 3:14,17,18; 4:1,15,19; 5:10.** This epistle was written at a time of severe trial with more on the way. Peter exhorts his readers to endure the suffering because of their glorious future hope. He repeatedly sobers them by getting them to reflect on their calling: "**Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father**" **1:5**; "**ye are a chosen generation**" **2:10.** He constantly refers to what has been achieved for us by the sacrifice of Christ: **1:2,3,10-11,18-21; 3:18; 4:1,13.** He impresses the importance of God's grace extended to us: **1:13; 2:3.** He also emphasises the obligations we face as a result of this grace: **1:14-17,22; 2:1,11-18; 3:1; 5:10.** Peter constantly sets before us our great example, the Lord Jesus Christ. Did not he receive glory at God's right hand once his trial had ended? **2:20-25; 3:17-18; 4:14.** Peter therefore constantly emphasises there is reward for the faithful and that trials develop faith and character. The second coming of Christ and the glory he will bring is a constant theme: **1:5,7,13; 2:12; 4:7,17; 5:1,4.**

## THE LIFE OF CHRIST AT THE CENTRE OF THE EPISTLE

**Key Scripture: 1 Peter 2:21-25** For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, **leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:** Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, **reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:** Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, **that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness:** by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.

The book of Isaiah reaches its climax in **Isaiah 53.** So too with this section in **1 Peter** which quotes extensively from **Isaiah 53.** Jesus Christ did not die as a substitute (as many churches teach) but as **an example** for us to follow. Jesus bore the trial patiently and without resisting, even seeking forgiveness for his persecutors: **Lk 23:34.** Jesus Christ is our example of enduring afflictions because of the hope of future glory: **Heb 12:3-4; Mk 8:34-35; Phil 2:5-9.**



## PETER'S ALLUSIONS TO THE EXODUS AND WILDERNESS

These early believers, "*chosen*" and "*elect*" like the children of Israel, were the new spiritual Israel in a hostile environment. They were called out not to a physical separation from society, but to developing a frame of mind of "*strangers and pilgrims*". Consider the words of **1 Pet 1:2-7,13** in light of **Deut 4:37; 7:6; 14:2; Isa 45:4; Psalms 105:6; Ex 24:7-8; 1 Cor 10:1-2; Ex 12:23; 32:24; 12:11** (in that specific order). Peter in **1 Pet 1:16** directly quotes **Lev 11:44-45.**

## IMPORTANT BACKGROUND IN THE PROPHECY OF DANIEL

The fact the epistle was written in "*Babylon*" (**5:13**) to "*sojourners*" in a foreign land (**1:1**) should alert us immediately to this. The main persecutor of the ecclesia is described as a roaring lion (**5:8**) which reminds us of Daniel in the lion's den. Right at the beginning of the epistle the persecution is described as "*fiery trials*" (**1:7; 4:12**) again a clear reference to Daniel's friends in the fiery furnace. He refers to prophets searching diligently (**1:10**) and what better example than the prophet Daniel! We are reminded that all flesh is grass (**1:24**), which is what Nebuchadnezzar learnt when he became like the beasts of the field eating grass. Peter quotes Old Testament Scriptures with reference to Jesus Christ being the chief corner stone (**2:4-8**). The most important aspect of Daniel's prophecy is the stone power which smites the image on the feet.

Submission to rulers (**2:13-18**) is exactly what Daniel and his friends did, despite the hostility. Peter reminds us that God's ears are open to our prayers (**3:12; 4:7**), a really important aspect of Daniel's life. Peter exhorts believers to be good examples to those outside, despite false accusations (**2:15; 3:16**). What better example than Daniel and his friends. Peter warns of drunkenness and partying. Belshazzar's feast is the epitome of that. Peter exhorts believers to humility (**5:5**) and what better example than the lesson learnt by Nebuchadnezzar! Glory and dominion for ever is promised by Peter (**5:10-12**) as it is in Daniel. In **2 Peter** we are encouraged by an "*everlasting kingdom*" (**2 Pet 1:11**) as we are in Daniel. We have a "*sure word of prophecy*" says Peter (**2 Pet 1:19**), and what better sure foundation than the prophet Daniel! Peter warns of false teachers with great swelling words (**2 Pet 2:3,18**), the ultimate example of this is the blasphemous little horn on the fourth beast!

## 1 PETER PROJECTS US INTO THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Revelation continues a similar pattern. Most strikingly of all, the final 3 times *apokalupsis* is used prior to **Rev 1:1** is in **1 Pet 1:7,13; 4:13.** The NT usage of this word generally relates to the **revealing of Christ and the Saints in glory** and particularly in the context of overcoming trials. A prime example of this is **Rom 8:19.** Revelation constantly presents visions of the Kingdom where believers are revealed in glory after overcoming tribulation and persecution.

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