

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

1 PETER

THEME

Author and Title

That this letter was written by the apostle Peter is explicitly affirmed by [1:1](#) and by the author's claim to be an "eyewitness of the sufferings of Christ" ([5:1](#)). The title of the letter, *The First Letter of Peter*, functions as early external evidence for the view that the letter was written by Peter. Indeed, in the early church there was no dispute over the authenticity of the letter, for it was regularly ascribed to Peter by the early church fathers.

Some recent scholars maintain that the letter is pseudonymous (falsely ascribed to Peter). Thus some have argued that: (1) the cultivated Greek of the letter could not have been written by a Galilean fisherman like Peter; (2) the theology is too much like Paul's to be ascribed to Peter; (3) the OT citations come from the Greek OT (Septuagint), but the genuine Peter would have cited the Hebrew OT; (4) the background of the letter reflects the reign of the Roman emperors Domitian (A.D. 81–96) or Trajan (98–117), both of whom reigned after Peter's death; and (5) the genuine Peter would have referred more to the historical Jesus.

None of these objections are compelling, and there are persuasive reasons for continuing to support Petrine authorship: (1) Peter was a middle-class fisherman who very likely knew Greek from his youth. There is significant evidence that Greek was spoken quite commonly in Galilee. Furthermore, Peter may have used a secretary, namely Silvanus (cf. note on [1 Pet. 5:12](#)), to assist him in composing the letter. (2) Although the common elements in the theology of Peter and Paul should not be exaggerated (for there are distinctive themes in Peter; e.g., the particular emphasis on suffering), it should not be surprising that Peter and Paul shared the same theology. (3) It is hardly unexpected that Peter would cite the Greek OT in writing to Greek readers. (4) There is no clear evidence that the letter was written under the reign of Domitian or Trajan (see [Purpose, Occasion, and Background](#)). (5) The reader must be careful of saying what an author "must do"; i.e., although one cannot demand that Peter refer to the historical Jesus in a short letter written for a specific purpose, there is significant evidence that Peter alludes to some of the sayings of Jesus (e.g., [Luke 12:35](#) in [1 Pet. 1:13](#); [Matt. 5:16](#) in [1 Pet. 2:12](#); [Matt. 5:10](#) in [1 Pet. 3:14](#)). (6) Finally, there

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

is no historical evidence in early church history that pseudonymous books, especially letters, were accepted as authoritative and inspired. Indeed, writing in someone else's name was considered deceptive (cf. [2 Thess. 2:2; 3:17](#)). On balance, there are compelling reasons to conclude that the apostle Peter is in fact the author of 1 Peter.

Date

2

The date of 1 Peter is linked with the issue of authorship. Those who reject Peter as the author typically date the letter in the reign of Domitian (A.D. 81–96) or Trajan (98–117). Since there are good grounds for holding to Petrine authorship, the letter probably should be dated during the reign of Nero (A.D. 54–68). The reference to Babylon in [5:13](#) is almost certainly a reference to Rome, leading one to conclude that Peter wrote the letter from Rome. He probably wrote before the Neronian persecution in Rome, and thus the date of composition is likely A.D. 62–63.

Theme

Those who persevere in faith while suffering persecution should be full of hope, for they will certainly enjoy end-time salvation since they are already enjoying God's saving promises here and now through the death and resurrection of Christ.

Purpose, Occasion, and Background

Peter encourages his readers to endure suffering and persecution ([1:6–7; 2:18–20; 3:9, 13–17; 4:1–4, 12–19; 5:9](#)) by giving themselves entirely to God ([4:19](#)). They are to remain faithful in times of distress, knowing that God will vindicate them and that they will certainly enjoy the salvation that the Lord has promised. The death and resurrection of Christ stand as the paradigm for the lives of believers. Just as Christ suffered and then entered into glory, so too his followers will suffer before being exalted.

The letter is addressed to Christians dispersed in "Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" ([1:1](#)), an area north of the Taurus Mountains in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey); see [map](#). These provinces were ethnically (and at times linguistically) diverse, yet all these territories had been impacted by Greco-Roman culture and were firmly under Roman control from the mid-first century B.C. The order in which the areas are listed probably designates the order in which the courier (Silvanus, see [5:12](#)) would carry the letter to its intended readership.

Most scholars are convinced that the recipients of 1 Peter were primarily Gentiles. The reference to their "former ignorance" ([1:14](#)) and "the futile ways inherited from your forefathers" ([1:18](#)) suggests a pagan past that would not fit with Jewish readers.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Further, the former lifestyle of the readers ([4:3-4](#)) fits with Gentiles rather than Jews. But undoubtedly there were also some Jewish Christians in these churches, for Jewish residents of “Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia” were present at Pentecost and heard the gospel at that early date ([Acts 2:9](#); see note on [Acts 9:19b-20](#)). Though the recipients may have been literally “exiles” ([1 Pet. 1:1, 17; 2:11](#)), it is more likely that Peter speaks figuratively here: they are spiritual exiles awaiting their heavenly inheritance.

In the past, many scholars detected an empire-wide persecution of Christians in 1 Peter, whether under Nero (A.D. 54–68), Domitian (81–96), or Trajan (98–117), and even used this argument to deny that Peter wrote the letter by specifically placing 1 Peter in the reign of either Domitian or Trajan. However, the evidence is lacking for an official government policy against Christians in the reign of all these emperors. Instead, there were spasmodic and general outbursts against Christians during the first century. Nero’s persecution of Christians after the great fire in Rome (A.D. 64) did not launch official empire-wide persecution of all Christians; nor does 1 Peter reflect an official policy against Christians. Also, an empire-wide decree against Christians is not necessitated by Peter’s writing about the need to respond when asked about one’s faith ([3:15](#)), the charges brought against Christians ([4:14-16](#)), or the reference to believers suffering worldwide ([5:9](#)). The questions and charges brought against Christians that Peter mentions in [3:15 and 4:14-16](#) were typical of the everyday questions believers would encounter because of their faith. In some instances, Roman authorities punished Christians, but even in these cases it was a local and restricted response. The reference to believers suffering throughout the world ([5:9](#)) does not signal that the Roman Empire had passed a decree against the Christian faith. This verse simply reveals that the Christian faith was under threat in the entire Greco-Roman world. Indeed, 1 Peter says nothing about Christians suffering physically for their faith. The focus is on the verbal abuse and discrimination they receive because of their Christian commitment ([4:3-4](#)). Of course, verbal abuse easily leads to physical mistreatment, and it is possible that some of the believers to whom Peter wrote were suffering physical abuse for their faith as well (cf. [2:18-20](#)).

Key Themes

1. Those who suffer as Christians will be exalted.	1:6-9; 2:18-25; 3:13-22; 4:12-19
2. The church of Jesus Christ is the new temple, the new Israel, the new people of God.	1:1-2; 2:4-10

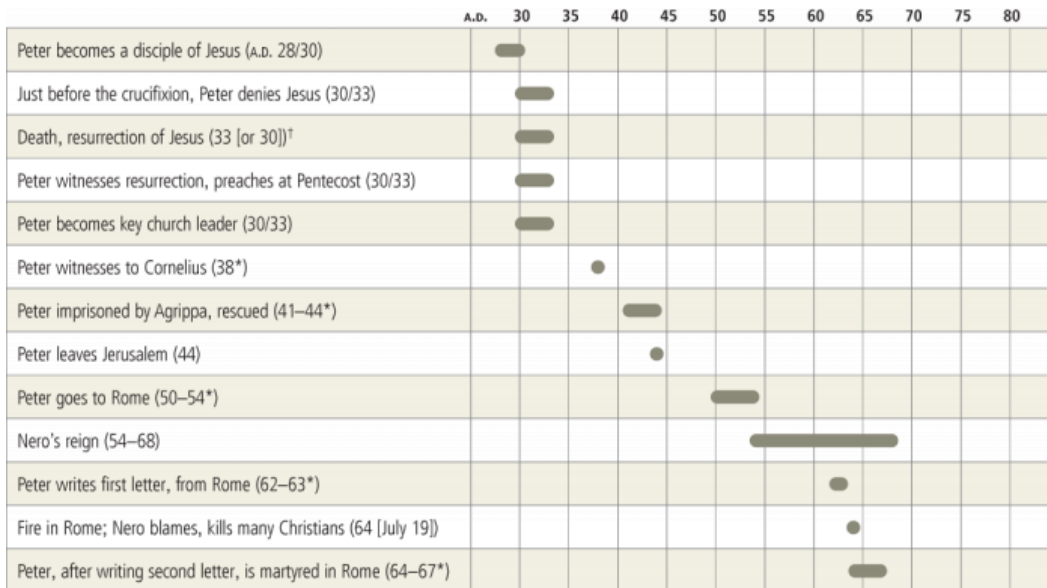
Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

3. Believers should set their hope on their end-time inheritance.	1:3-9, 13-16
4. Christ died as a substitute for sinners, and his death is the basis for their new life.	1:17-21; 2:24; 3:13-22
5. Christ's suffering is an example to his disciples.	2:21-23
6. At his resurrection, Christ triumphed over his enemies.	3:18-22
7. Christians should live righteously in their homes and in society.	2:11-3:7
8. New life in Christ is the basis for a life of love and holiness.	1:3; 1:13-2:3

History of Salvation Summary

Christians are to endure suffering for the sake of Christ, looking back on Christ's sufferings and forward to the consummation of salvation in his second coming. (For an explanation of the "History of Salvation," see [Overview of the Bible](#).)

Timeline



* denotes approximate date; / signifies either/or; † see *The Date of Jesus' Crucifixion*, pp. 1809-1810

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Literary Features

First Peter follows the usual contours of the NT epistles. Along with the standard ingredients of salutation-thanksgiving-body-*paraenesis* (moral exhortations)-closing, there is a pattern of back-and-forth movement between theological assertions and either practical application or lyric celebration. The book moves in a fluid manner between two poles: the *riches* that believers have in Christ and the *duties* they need to shoulder, within the implied situation of their living in a hostile surrounding culture.

5

First Peter is exuberant in tone and exalted in language. Virtually every paragraph contains vivid imagery and a skillful use of figurative language. The tone of the book is urgent and intense, as signaled by the presence of more than 30 imperative verbs (an average of one command in every three verses). The content and style are thus elevated and elevating.

The Setting of 1 Peter

c. A.D. 62–63

Peter, probably writing from Rome (called “Babylon” in [5:13](#)), addressed 1 Peter to believers in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. These names all referred to Roman provinces in Asia Minor, north of the Taurus Mountains.



Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Outline

- I. Opening ([1:1-2](#))
- II. Called to Salvation as Exiles ([1:3-2:10](#))
 - A. Praise for salvation ([1:3-12](#))
 - B. The future inheritance as an incentive to holiness ([1:13-21](#))
 - C. Living as the new people of God ([1:22-2:10](#))
- III. Living as Aliens to Bring Glory to God in a Hostile World ([2:11-4:11](#))
 - A. The Christian life as a battle and a witness ([2:11-12](#))
 - B. Testifying to the gospel in the social order ([2:13-3:12](#))
 - C. Responding to suffering in a godly way ([3:13-4:11](#))
- IV. Persevering in Suffering ([4:12-5:11](#))
- V. Concluding Words ([5:12-14](#))¹

¹ Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (pp. 2401-2404). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.