

# The First Letter of Peter

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## A Living Hope

There are two letters attributed to St. Peter in the New Testament. The early church also held that the Gospel of Mark was a summary of the gospel teaching of Peter (see 1 Peter 5:13). The letter was most likely written sometime around 60-63 BC while Peter was Bishop of Rome (see 5:13, Babylon is an early church word for Rome). He used the services of a secretary named Silvanus (Silas) who Peter describes as a “faithful brother” in 5:12.

As one of the first 12 disciples and the preeminent of the disciples, the Apostle Peter’s teaching is vital to all of the Church everywhere not only in his day, but for all time. While the specific audience he addresses is in Asia Minor, this letter was widely circulated. Therefore the church has traditionally grouped the letters of Peter within a larger section of the New Testament. The group of letters is known as the “General Epistles” or the “Catholic Epistles”-- Catholic meaning the united and universal Church across geography and time. The other Catholic Epistles are James, 2 Peter, 1, 2, 3 John and Jude.

The main focus of 1 Peter is on living as the holy people of God as exiles in a world reserved for the Day of Visitation and Judgment. For Peter, the “time of Judgment” (4:17) has begun with the people of God as they are being tested in the “genuineness of their faith”(1:7) through a “fiery trial”(4:12).

Peter’s concern in his letter though is not merely the salvation/judgment of the “exiled” people of God, but also for the unbelieving souls of those in relationship to them, “the Gentiles”. Ultimately, all people will have to “give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.” Therefore, the witness of the Christian life well lived to the glory of God not confirms their own personal salvation (1:7) but also will confirm the salvation (2:12) or judgment (4:5) of those who see their lives lived to the praise of God and respond in either faith or reviling.

## Literary Structure

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<b>1 Peter: A Living Hope</b>	<b>Chapters 1-5</b>
A Heavenly Inheritance: Salvation at the End of Times	1:1-13
A Living Temple: The Redeemed People of God	1:14-2:10
A Sojourn in Exile: Glorifying God Among Unbelievers	2:11-3:13
A Fiery Trial: Suffering in the Flesh for God’s Ultimate Glory	3:13-5:14

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## **A Living Hope: Salvation at the End of Times (1:1-13)**

Peter addresses his letter to the “elect exiles of the dispersion”. Prior to the coming of Jesus Christ this could have referred only to Jews who had been exiled from the Promise Land because of the Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Roman occupations of the geographic region called Israel. The hope of the exiles was a return to the Inheritance of the Land, a Restored Temple and a Messianic Davidic King.

Peter is proclaiming the restoration of Inheritance Land, Temple and King. Only the restoration offered in the New Covenant is more ultimate than that of the hopes of pre-Jesus Israelite exiles. Peter is describing a “living Hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead , to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven....”

Yes there is a Promised inheritance of Land, but it is no longer to be seen in geographic Israel. The true inheritance is being kept in heaven. The nature of the exiled people of God changes after the coming of Jesus Christ. Their hope is NOT in a salvation from geographic exile and a return to geographic plot of land, but the living hope is an a salvation from the present age to the inheritance of a New Heavens and New Earth on the last day.

The prophets who hinted at this salvation, such as Jeremiah, Joel, Isaiah and Ezekiel (among others) did not know the exact details of the larger fulfillment of the promises that they preached. Even the angels of God longed to look into these matters:

*<sup>10</sup> Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, <sup>11</sup> inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. <sup>12</sup> It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. 1 Peter 1:10-12*

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## **A Living Temple: The Redeemed People of God (1:14-2:10)**

Like the letters to the Hebrews and Ephesians, 1 Peter sees all of the promises of a restored Temple as finding their fulfillment in the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross and his resurrection. Jesus taught his disciples that the Earthly Temple would be destroyed (John and that he would raise a new Temple, a Living Temple in his body. (John 2:19-21)

Peter’s teaching is that God has redeemed his people through the offering of Jesus as a sacrificial lamb.

*...conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, <sup>18</sup> knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, <sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. 1 Peter 1:17-19*

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As a redeemed people of God, the call is to a life of holiness and mutual love. The believer has been “born again” through the “living and abiding word of God” (1:23). Quoting Isaiah 8:14, 28:16 & Psalm 118:22, Peter describes Jesus as the Chief Cornerstone of a living spiritual temple being made of human stones. The priests of the new temple no longer need to offer physical blood sacrifices. All the people of God are now priests who offer spiritual sacrifices. (2:5)

Those who have been called and believe in Jesus Christ are the redeemed and restored Israel. Using language of the Old Covenant, he identifies them:

*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

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Their call is to be the holy people of God in a world which is still in rebellion and under the judgment of God.

### **A Sojourn in Exile: Glorifying God among Unbelievers (2:11-3:13)**

The hope for the unbelieving people of the world is that they will see the witness of holiness, love and service manifest in the redeemed people of God and the living Temple and be drawn into the praise of God. The Lord will use the “living and abiding word” spoken by believers. However, the real testimony to unbelievers will come in unusual deeds of a holy life lived in humble submission.

*<sup>11</sup> Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. <sup>12</sup> Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.*

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The holiness of life of Christians will become an occasion for reviling. However, the character of love and service will be the irresistible counterforce to “win souls” for Christ.

The Christian will bear his or her witness in the context of the public square, in business relationships, and in the household. In the public square, the Christian is to “honor everyone” including the secular government! “Honor the emperor!” (2:17).

In the master-servant relationships, employees and slaves should be submissive to their masters—even if they are abusive! The model in all of these relationships is Christ Jesus who “when he was reviled, did not revile in return.” On the contrary as he was being mistreated, he entrusted himself to God and thereby bore our sins on his body.

*<sup>21</sup> For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. <sup>22</sup> He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. <sup>23</sup> When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. <sup>24</sup> He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. <sup>25</sup> For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. 1 Peter 2:21-25*

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While this is one of the clearest verses on nature of Jesus' substitutionary atonement for us (cf. Isaiah 53:4-6), Peter's uses Christ's atonement as a model to follow in the example of Christ's sufferings. It was his humble servant actions without reviling that led to our conversion and salvation. It will be our humble servant actions without reviling that (if God so wills) can be effective to "win" the souls of the unbelieving people in our lives. He applies this principle to wives married to unbelieving husbands:

*Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, <sup>2</sup> when they see your respectful and pure conduct. 1 Peter 3:1-2*

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The call of the people of God has always been to be a blessing to the nations. Jesus model and Peter's call to the redeemed people of God is to manifest blessing even if we are receiving insults.

*Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. <sup>9</sup> Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. 3:8-9*

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## **A Fiery Trial: Suffering in the Flesh for God's Ultimate Glory (3:13-5:14)**

The last section of Peter's first letter, frames the suffering of the redeemed people of God in the larger context of God's ultimate glory. The "fiery trial" which we are enduring is only for a "little while". The people who revile and persecute the church will be "put to shame".

Just as the people who heard the message of salvation in Noah's day and in their rejection were swept away in a flood of judgment while Noah and his family were saved, so to the present unbelievers who are swept up in a "flood of debauchery" will have to "give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead (4:4-5).

In contrast, the people of God should the test of the "fiery trial" knowing that the "end of all things is near" and that the present trials and sufferings are temporary (4:7) and short (for a little while, 5:10). The judgment that all people are ultimately to face is beginning with the people of God as a form of

testing and refining: “For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?” (4:17) If we are faithful to the example of Christ, when the “Chief Shepherd appears”, the Christian “will receive the unfading crown of glory.” (5:4)

# The Second Letter to Peter

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## Succession of the New Covenant

The first letter of Peter took all of the hopes and promises of restored inheritance of Promised Land, exile, restored temple, and restored messianic King of the first covenants and applied them to the redeemed New Covenant people of God.

The second letter of Peter serves a similar function for the New Covenant as the book of Deuteronomy does for the Old Covenant. Like Moses, Peter was the central spokesperson to convey the terms of the covenant to the people of God.

Utilizing the general framework of a constitutional treaty between a king and his subjects, Moses set out the terms for the relationship between YHWH and Israel. While significantly shorter than Deuteronomy, Peter utilizes a very similar structure to form the basis for his final letter to the church.

The logic of the treaty breaks into five parts:

- Preamble
- Historic Prologue
- Stipulations
- Blessing and Curses
- Succession

The preamble establishes the parties in the covenant relationship, God, his people and the Covenant Mediator (Moses or the Apostle). The Historic Prologue rehearses the mighty acts of salvation and redemption which established the relationship between God and his people in the first. The prologue recounts why the people owe their love and obedience to God.

Having established the relationship, the next section on stipulations outline the relationship expectations for the people of God. The blessings and curses section provides the positive and negative divine responses to the peoples faithfulness to the adhere to the stipulations.

The final section on succession makes allowance for how the terms of the covenant are to be passed on to future generations beyond the life of the covenant mediator. As Moses' personal ministry and leadership was drawing to a close due to his imminent death, he wrote out the terms of God's covenant with Israel for successive generations of leaders and followers of God. Just as Moses provided a framework for the people of God to continue in faithfulness to God's covenant for successive generations, so too did the apostles.

Consider the following 5 part outline of 2 Peter in comparison to the 5 part outline for Deuteronomy.

## Literary Structure

	Passing on the New Covenant	II Peter	Deuteronomy	Purpose	Application for the Covenant People of God
I	Preamble	1:1-2	1:1-4	Establishes the origins of the covenant relationship	Remember the God who has established a covenant you
II	Historic Prologue	1:3-4	1:5-4:43	rehearses the historical background of God's mercy	Remember what God has done on your behalf
III	Stipulations	1:5-7	4:44-26:19	outlines expectations of covenant life	Remember God's requirements for life
IV	Blessings and Curses and Ratification	1:8-11	27:1-30:20	presents blessings, curses and ratification of the covenant relationship	Remember the blessings curses and ratification of the covenant relationship
V	Succession	1:12-3:18	31:1-34:12	Spells out the continuation of covenant administration	Remember to listen to the God appointed leaders as bearers of the authoritative word of God

### The New Covenant (1:1-11)

The first chapter of 2 Peter establishes the covenant relationship between “our God and Savior Jesus” and the people of God with the apostles as mediators of the covenant. The relationship is framed entirely in terms of the New Covenant. Jesus is the “God and Savior” who through his divine nature has granted all things that pertain to “life and salvation”. Instead of providing an escape from an earthly bondage and slavery in Egypt, the salvation given by Jesus is from the “corruption in the world that is in the world because of sinful desires” (1:4). The promise offered is not a land flowing with “milk and honey”, but rather the promise to grant us “his own glory and excellence” that we “may become partakers of the divine nature” (1:3, 4)

In the New Covenant, the stipulations of God are not written on tablets of stone but on the human heart (Jer. 31:31). Therefore, the New Covenant call to obedience is in the form of character growth and change and not an external commandment.

*<sup>5</sup> For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, <sup>6</sup> and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, <sup>7</sup> and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. 2 Peter 1:5-7*

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In both the Old and the New Covenant, the believer is justified by faith in the promise of God and not by works. It is God who calls his people and saves them from bondage to evil. However, true faith in the promises of God will manifest itself in fruits of obedience. These fruits displayed in increasing measure provide assurance of salvation. Whoever, “lacks these qualities” does not evidence the fruit of salvation and election.

*For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. <sup>10</sup> Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. <sup>11</sup> For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1:8-11*

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In the Old Covenant, the consequences for those who did or did not live in faithfulness revolved around blessings and curses in the land of promise. With the New Covenant the blessings and curses are ultimate. Faithful believers will be “richly provided” with an “entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” The curses are ultimate as well. Here he mentions the potential to “fall”. Later in Chapter’s 2 and 3, he will be quite specific.

Finally, Peter addresses the issue of succession. Like Moses, writes of himself at the end of Deuteronomy (Deut. 32:50), Peter has been given knowledge of his own impending “exodus” (1:15) from this world. His primary concern is for the succession of the faith to future generations. The apostles are dying, but the faith does not die with them.

*Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. <sup>13</sup> I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, <sup>14</sup> since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. <sup>15</sup> And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things. —2 Peter 1:12-15*

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How will Peter make every effort to insure the church’s recall of the faith? It must be written down. Here we find the verbalization fundamental reason for the writing of Scripture--succession. Peter now moves to the issue of authority of apostolic teaching verse the false teaching of false prophets.

Succession: II Peter 1:12-3:18		Purpose	Application	
V.a	Departure of the Apostles the provision of the New Covenant Scriptures	(1:12-15)	Provide provision of New Covenant dynastic disposition	Remember the New Covenant through the provision of the New Covenant Scriptures
V.b	Authority of Apostles and the New Covenant Scriptures	(1:16-21)	Ratification of Covenant	Recognize the Authority of the Apostles Call under Jesus Christ and pay attention to the New Covenant Scriptures
V.c	Threat for departure from the New Covenant Scriptures	(2:1-22)	Dire treat to false teachers, and warning against apostasy	Shun apostasy from the New Covenant Scriptures of the Apostles of Jesus Christ
V.d	Promise for faithfulness to New Covenant Scriptures	(3:1-18)	Promise for covenant faithfulness to the Apostolic Word and Command	Remain faithful to the New Covenant Scriptures commanded by the Apostles of Jesus Christ

## Prophecy: True and False (1:19-2:2)

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### Chiasmic Structure of II Peter (section on prophecy: true and false)

<b>A</b>	v. 1:19	New Testament–True Prophecy	Apostles of Jesus Christ
<b>B</b>	v. 1:20, 21a	Old Testament–True Prophecy	Past Prophets of God
<b>C</b>	v. 1:21b	True Prophecy in General–Key Point	All Prophets
<b>B'</b>	v. 2:1	Old Testament–False Prophecy	Past False Prophets
<b>A'</b>	v. 2:2	New Testament–False Prophecy	Present False Prophets