

1 Peter

Persecution can either cause you to grow or grumble in the Christian life. It all depends on your response! In writing to Jewish believers struggling in the midst of persecution, Peter reminds them of their “roots.” They have been born again to a living hope, and therefore both their character and conduct can be above reproach as they imitate the Holy One who called them. The fruit of that proven character will be actions rooted in submission and love.

INTRODUCTION

Persecution can cause either growth or bitterness in the Christian life. Response determines the result. In writing to Jewish believers struggling in the midst of persecution, Peter encourages them to conduct themselves courageously for the person and program of Christ. Both their character and conduct must be above reproach. Having been born again to a living hope, they are to imitate the Holy One who has called them. The fruit of that character will be conduct rooted in submission: citizens to government, servants to masters, wives to husbands, husbands to wives, and Christians to one another. Only after submission is fully understood does Peter deal with a difficult area of suffering. The follower of Jesus is not to “be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you” (4:12) but to rejoice as partakers of the suffering of Christ. That response to life is truly the climax of one’s submission to the good hand of God.

AUTHOR

The apostle Peter (1:1) wrote this letter with the assistance of Silvanus (also referred to as Silas (5:12)). The early church universally acknowledged the authenticity and authority of 1 Peter and the internal evidence supports this consistent external testimony.

DATE & SETTING

This letter is addressed “to God’s chosen people who are living as foreigners” or “exiles of the Dispersion” (1:1). Most likely it was received by Christians throughout Asia Minor, indicating the spread of the gospel in regions not evangelized when Acts was written. It is possible that Peter visited and ministered in some of these areas, but there is no evidence. He wrote this letter in response to the news of growing opposition to the believers in Asia Minor. Hostility and suspicion were mounting against followers of Jesus in the empire, and they were being reviled and abused for their lifestyles and subversive talk about another Kingdom. Christianity had not yet received the official Roman ban, but the stage was being set for the persecution and martyrdom of the near future.

This epistle was written from Babylon (5:13), but scholars are divided as to whether this refers literally to Babylon in Mesopotamia or symbolically to Rome. There is no tradition that Peter went to Babylon and in his day, it had few inhabitants. On the other hand, tradition consistently indicates that Peter spent the last years of his life in Rome. As a center of idolatry, the term “Babylon” was an appropriate figurative designation for Rome (the latter use of Babylon in Revelation 17-18). This epistle was probably written shortly before the outbreak of persecution under Nero in A.D. 64.