

I OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK OF I PETER

PURPOSE: To offer encouragement to suffering and persecuted Christians.

AUTHOR: Peter, the apostle.

TIMELINE: Approximately 62-64 A.D.

SETTING: Peter was possibly in Rome when the great Christian persecution under Nero began in 64 AD. Peter was martyred during this persecution which tortured and killed Christians and scattered them from the church at Jerusalem.

BLUEPRINT: A. God’s great blessings to his people (1:1-2:10)

B. Conduct of God’s people in the midst of suffering (2:11-4:19)

C. Shepherding of God’s people in the midst of suffering (5:1-14)

MEGATHEMES OF I PETER

THEME	EXPLANATION	IMPORTANCE
Salvation	Our salvation is a precious gift from God, who chose us out of His love for us. Jesus died to pay the penalty of our sin and the Holy Spirit cleansed us from sin when we believed. Eternal life is a wonderful gift for those who trust in Christ.	Our safety and security are in God. If we experience joy in relationship with Christ now, how much greater will our joy be when He returns and we see Him face to face. Such a hope should motivate us to serve Christ with greater commitment.
Persecution	Peter offers faithful believers comfort and hope. Christians should expect ridicule, rejection, and suffering. Persecution makes us stronger because it refines our faith. We can face persecution victoriously, as Christ did, if we rely on Him.	Christians still suffer for what they believe. We should expect persecution, but we don’t have to be terrified by it. The fact that we will live eternally with Christ should give us the confidence, patience, and hope to stand firm even when we are persecuted.
God’s family	We are privileged to belong to God’s family, a community with Christ as the founder and the foundation. Everyone in this community is related, as we are all brothers and sisters, loved equally by God.	Because Christ is the foundation of our family, we must be devoted, loyal and faithful to Him. By obeying Him, we show that we are His children. We must accept the challenge to live differently from the society around us.
Family Life	Peter encouraged the wives of unbelievers to submit to their husbands’ authority as a means to winning them to Christ. He urged all family members to treat others with sympathy, love, compassion and humility.	We must treat our families lovingly. Though it is not easy, willing service is the best way to influence loved ones. To gain the strength we need for self-discipline and submission, we need the help of the Holy Spirit.

THEME	EXPLANATION	IMPORTANCE
Judgment	God will judge everyone with perfect justice and we will all face Him. He will punish evildoers and those who persecute God's people. Those who love Him will be rewarded with life forever in His presence.	Because all are accountable to God, we can leave the judgment of others to Him. We must not hate or resent those who persecute us. We should realize that we will be held responsible for how we live each day.

II BACKGROUND

One of the major themes of **I Peter** is the challenge to be God's people in a world that is very often hostile to our convictions. After having established: (1) the certainty and joy of salvation (**I Peter 1:1-12**); and, (2) holiness as the standard that Christians must embrace (**I Peter 1:13-25**), Peter continues the idea of establishing a consistency between belief and daily living. A Christian needs to consistently display the new identity (**II Corinthians 5:17**) he or she has in Jesus Christ under all circumstances.

For any Christian, displaying this new behavior is a two-fold exercise. It includes shunning sinful behaviors and embracing Christ-like behaviors. Peter consistently focused on Jesus Christ as the standard for behavior and he knew this focus would be a challenge because of our flesh. However, in spite of our physical weaknesses, Jesus can be a source of strength that will never disappoint those who follow Him. He is also a source of judgment for those who refuse Him, and this paradigm causes unavoidable division.

Peter called Christians to embrace their identity as strangers or sojourners in a strange land and be the positive witnesses for Christ which believers in any time or place are expected to be. Many Christians today fail to grasp the significance of who we are as God's people and neglect to consistently live in accord with that identity.

III SCRIPTURE

SPIRITUAL NURTURE (I PETER 2:1-3)

In Chapter 1, Peter demonstrated the glory and eternal character of God's Word. He uses the preposition "therefore", indicating in light of what God's Word is to us we should receive it with an open heart. In Chapter 2, Peter focuses on the glory and duty of God's people.

I Peter 2 - Glory and Duty of God's People

(1-3): How to respond to the eternal Word of God: Peter makes it crystal clear that to grow by the Word we must receive it with a certain humble attitude of heart (**Isaiah 57:15; Colossians 3:12; Titus 3:2**). In order to be open to the full measure of God's Word, we have to lay aside all malice, guile, hypocrisy, envy, and evil speaking (e.g., spicy hurtful gossip). Elimination of these destructive spiritual forces leads a Christian to attaining a humble and honest heart; always willing to obediently do what the Word of God says.

Wickedness: Starts in heart where sin is rooted. Wicked attitudes and actions issue forth from a wicked heart.

Deceit: Guile, actions to mislead and defraud, actions of an insincere and inauthentic person.

Hypocrisy: Method of flattery and evil deception, can undermine a community.

Envy: Jealousy one feels at the site of excellence; lowering the performance of a community by dumbing-down high standards; desires the downfall of others (e.g., misery loves company).

Slander: Speaking against someone with an emphasis on evil speech; gossip.

Together all of these make sincere love (I Corinthians 13:4-7) impossible.

The Word of God, the only offensive weapon of our spiritual armor (**Ephesians 6:17**), is necessary for the growth of the Christian (**II Timothy 3:16**).

All Christians should desire the pure milk of the Word, even though Paul rebuked the Corinthian Christians for being able to only receive milk (**I Corinthians 3:1-2**), and the author of the Hebrews, the same (**Hebrews 5:10-14**).

Who are the newborn babes that Peter refers to? In a sense, we all are. "The most advanced among us, in knowledge and attainment, are, in comparison with what they shall be, only as babes." (Meyer)

"To drink the milk of the Word is to 'taste' again and again what he is like, for in the hearing of the Lord's words believers experience the joy of personal fellowship with the Lord himself." (Grudem)

Therefore, the Christian should never get tired of the simple truths of the gospel which are simply presented (**Matthew 5:11-12**), as each time they are heard, they evoke further growth and lead to greater maturity.

The primary step in Christian growth is the simple realization that God commands nothing that is not for both our eternal and temporal good (Psalm 119:105; Romans 8:28).

If we have tasted, or personally experienced, that the Lord is gracious, then we have all the more reason and responsibility to receive the word in the enthusiastic way that babies receive their milk.

When we are born again, we become spiritual newborn babies. If we are healthy, we will yearn to grow. A healthy new baby has an instinctive yearning for its mother's milk. Once we see our need for God's Word and seek nourishment in Christ, our spiritual appetite will increase and then we will start to mature.

DIVINE PURPOSE (I PETER 2:4-10)

In describing the church as God's spiritual temple, Peter drew on the Old Testament texts that were familiar to his Jewish readers (Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 8:14; Isaiah 28:16). His readers would have understood the living stones to be Israel and thus they could understand that the cornerstone is Jesus Christ. Once again Peter showed that the church does not cancel the Jewish heritage, but fulfills it.

(4-5): Coming to Jesus: Peter illustrates God building a spiritual temple using living stones (i.e., Christians), those who have come to the ultimate Living Stone (i.e., Jesus).

Coming to Him underscores our continual need for God. Salvation is only the beginning point, but our growth in Christ is a daily ongoing reality. Notably, the form of the Greek verb for "coming" indicates an ongoing action.

This spiritual house shows that as much as Israel had a temple, Christians have one also. However, the Christian's temple is spiritual, and they are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, Christians have parallels with Israel:

1. As much as Israel was chosen by God, the church is also chosen;
2. As much as Israel had priesthood, so Christians are a holy priesthood; and,
3. As much as Israel had sacrifices, so Christians offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God.

For almost 1,500 years (1443 BC – 29 AD) Israel had a priesthood and system of sacrificial offering. Christians have been and still are a holy priesthood (29 AD – Present) and have offered up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God for almost 2,000 years.

Even in the Old Testament, God made it clear that obedience from the heart was much more important than the offering of sacrifices (I Samuel 15:22; Psalm 40:6; Amos 5:21-24). Simply put, God wants us, His holy priests, to offer ourselves as a living and spiritual sacrifice (Romans 12:1-2) on a daily basis, laying aside our own desires and following Him; putting our energies and resources at His disposal, and trusting Him to guide us in all circumstances (Proverbs 3:5-6).

It is important to understand that we can only serve as priests as we do it through Jesus Christ. In ourselves, we have no priestly authority (**Hebrews 8:1-6**).

The believer is his own priest before God. He does not need any mediator except his great High Priest, Jesus. "There can no longer be an elite priesthood with claims of special access to God, or special privileges in worship or in fellowship with God." (Grudem)

(6-8) Glory of the Chief Cornerstone: If we are being built into a spiritual house there is no doubt that our Chief Cornerstone is Christ Jesus (**Isaiah 28:16; Ephesians 2:20**). Even though man has generally rejected Him, He has become the Chief Cornerstone in the work of building the church. Peter remembered the words of Jesus to him in **Matthew 16:16**, and **Matthew 16:18** about how He intends to build the church.

Jesus is the:
Cornerstone of Psalm 118:22;
Stumbling stone of Isaiah 8:14-15;
Foundation stone of Isaiah 28:16;
Supernatural stone of Daniel 2:44-45; and,
Rock that gave Israel water in the wilderness (I Corinthians 10:4)

Those who reject the Chief Cornerstone, refusing to build on Him, instead stumble over Him (**Romans 1:21-28**). Instead of being their salvation, Jesus becomes to them a rock of offense. It is appointed that those who are disobedient to the Word should stumble over Jesus (**I Corinthians 1:18**). When Jesus spoke of Himself as the stone of **Psalm 118:22**, He spoke of what those who rejected Him are appointed to. He stated, "And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder." (**Matthew 21:44**).

What are the characteristics of Jesus Christ the Cornerstone?

- (1) He is completely trustworthy;
- (2) He is precious to believers; and,
- (3) Though rejected by some, He is still the most important part of the church.

(9-10) Privileged place of God's people: The things that once exclusively belonged to Israel (i.e., election as the chosen people; priesthood; God's calling) (see **Romans 9**) are now no longer the property of Israel alone. These are now the property of every Christian, and we have them in a greater, spiritual sense, because of the blood of Jesus and the continuing work of the Holy Spirit.

The offices of royalty and priesthood were jealously separated in Israel, but Jesus, who is our King and Priest, has brought them together for His people.

Peter refers to the Book of **Hosea** as a background for the point he is about to make. Hosea's children from his promiscuous wife, Gomer, were named, "no compassion" and "not my people", as a judgment on the people of Israel for their faithlessness. Later, God exercised His tender love and declared again that the nation would be His people (**Hosea 2:23**).

We are special because we belong to God who takes ordinary people and makes them special. Our relationship to Christ is far more important than our jobs, spouses, children, successes, wealth and knowledge. Your value comes from being one of God's children (**John 1:12**), not from what you can achieve. You have worth because of what God does, not because of what you do.

These same titles were applied to Israel (Exodus 19:5-6, Deuteronomy 4:20, Deuteronomy 7:6, Isaiah 43:20-21). Now in Jesus, we belong to God as His own special people.

In our culture, with its Christian foundations, we don't understand the tremendous sense of privilege and relief that came to Gentiles as they were able to share in the New Covenant with the God of Israel. Peter's message is nonetheless wonderful: "You didn't used to belong, but now you belong to God and among God's people."

The purpose for these high privileges is not so we can grow proud, but so that we can proclaim the praises of Him who has done such great things for us.