

# 1 Peter: Suffering With Dignity

## TITLE

The first epistle to Peter is named after the author: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ” (1:1). The consensus of early writers was that the apostle Peter was the author. Peter means “rock” or “stone.”

## BACKGROUND

This is another “general epistle.” The other general epistles are 2 Peter; 1, 2, 3 John; and Jude.

Peter is one of the better known Bible characters. We can identify with his obvious “humanness.” According to tradition, Peter was crucified head downward about A.D. 65-67 during the persecution of Nero which began A.D. 64.

The letters of Peter may have been written as partial fulfillment of Jesus’ charge to the apostle to strengthen and feed the church (Lk. 22:32; Jn. 21:15-17). The first letter is addressed “to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1:1), five Roman provinces in the northern part of Asia Minor; they covered the greater part of what is now Turkey. The phrase “aliens, scattered” has a Jewish flavor, but Christians had also been scattered (Acts 8:1ff.). “Aliens” is Peter’s way of reminding Christians this world is not their home (2:11). The phrasing of the book indicates Peter primarily has a Gentile audience in mind (2:10; 4:3, 4; etc.).

In 5:12 Peter summarizes his first letter: “I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!” It is obvious that suffering, persecution, and trials are on Peter’s mind; he mentions suffering about sixteen times in the book. In 5:12 he says, “I have written to you to let you know it is through the grace of God that you can *stand up under trials*.” The book emphasizes the suffering of Jesus as an example for His followers (2:21-25; 3:18ff.; 4:1, 13; etc.).

If the suffering mentioned is that initiated by Nero after the fire of A.D. 64, the book had to be written between that time and the time of Peter’s death; the time of the writing is probably A.D. 64-67.

One of the most questionable things about the book is the *place* of writing. Peter indicates he is in “Babylon” when he writes (5:13). Many think this is a cryptic way of referring to Rome: Strong early tradi-

tion says Peter spent his last years in Rome; it was not uncommon for Rome to be called “Babylon” (Rev. 17:18). Others deny this, saying there was no reason for Peter to be obscure about where he was; they insist Peter was probably at the original Babylon on the Euphrates during his many travels (Acts 12:17). There is no way to settle the controversy, but even if Peter spent time in Rome, it does not validate the claim that “Peter was the first pope.” In 1 Peter the apostle identifies himself, not as “the pope” over all the church but as “an elder” (5:1, i.e., one of several) working with a local congregation (“the flock of God among you,” v. 2).

## OUTLINE

SALUTATION (1:1, 2).

### I. THE TRUE GRACE OF GOD (1:3—2:10).

- A. Testimony: The great salvation (1:3-12).
- B. General exhortation (1:13—2:10).

### II. THE TRUE GRACE OF GOD HELPS US STAND (2:11—3:12).

- A. Standing in various relationships (2:11—3:7):
  - 1. Relationships with unbelievers (2:11, 12).
  - 2. Relationships with the state (2:13-17).
  - 3. Relationships with masters (2:18-25).
  - 4. Relationships in marriage (3:1-7).
- B. General exhortation (3:8-12).

### III. THE TRUE GRACE OF GOD HELPS US STAND UNDER TRIALS (3:13—5:11).

- A. Testimony: Understanding trials (3:13—4:19):
  - 1. The need to endure trials (3:13-22).
  - 2. How to live while enduring trials (4:1-11).
  - 3. The purpose of trials (4:12-19).
- B. General exhortation (5:1-11).

CONCLUSION AND BENEDICTION (5:12-14).

## LESSONS FROM 1 PETER

The “health and wealth gospel” is popular today. “Just be a Christian,” we are told, “and your problems will go away.” In contrast with that, Jesus and the apostles were candid about the problems which being a follower of the Lord would bring (Mt. 5:11; Acts

14:22; 2 Tim. 3:12). The message of 1 Peter is not that God removes all problems from His children, but rather that through His grace, we can endure the problems and actually be made better by them.

When a person has lived a worldly life (see 4:3) and becomes a Christian, he is sometimes surprised

and disappointed that his worldly buddies are not thrilled at his decision (consider 4:4).

As Christians, we need to learn to *suffer with dignity*. Especially when we do not deserve the suffering, we should behave like the followers of Jesus, who did not retaliate, but trusted in His Father.

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## Daughters of Sarah (1 Peter 3:1-7)

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If Abraham is the father of the faithful (Gen. 17:5; Rom. 4:11), Sarah is *the mother* of the faithful (Gen. 17:16; Is. 51:2). She was with Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees to the land of promise and beyond. When angels appeared to Abraham, she became the first woman in the Bible to offer hospitality. When at last Isaac was born, it was as much a result of Sarah's faith as it was Abraham's (Heb. 11:11).

Sarah is used to illustrate certain principles of marriage (3:5, 6). Note the phrase "whose daughters ye are" (KJV; see also NIV). Our lesson from 1 Pet. 3:1-7 is a tribute to all daughters of Sarah and a challenge to all women to become such examples of faith.

### I. DAUGHTERS OF SARAH ARE WILLINGLY SUBMISSIVE (3:1, 2, 4-6).

A. "In the same way" (v. 1) refers to the example of Jesus (2:21-25) who was willingly submissive to the will of God.

1. Submission has nothing to do with inferiority.
  - a. Jesus was not inferior to God (Phil. 2:5).
  - b. Peter stresses that husband and wife are "heirs *together* of the grace of life" (v. 7; KJV). Neither is more important than the other.
2. It has to do with respecting the will of God (note 2:15)! Like Jesus we need to submit to God's plan; He knows best.

B. Because Peter's over-all theme in this letter is that of persecution, he pictures a Christian wife married to a non-Christian husband. The principle of submission applies in all marriages (Gen. 3:16; Eph. 5:22-24; Col. 3:18; Tit. 2:5).

1. "Be submissive to" is from a military term that means "to place under rank" (note 1 Cor. 11:3).
2. "Without a word" suggests "without nagging." "Behavior" means "manner of life." Great power exists in a godly influence!
3. This submission is not merely outward, but reflects a submissive *spirit*.
  - a. Genuine respect (v. 2; NASB; KJV has "fear") (see Eph. 5:33).
  - b. "A gentle and quiet *spirit*" (v. 4).

C. The illustration of Sarah (vv. 5b, 6a).

1. "Lord" is a term of respect (see Gen. 18:12). "Calling" is the present participle, indicating *continuous* action.
2. This does not mean that she had no mind of her own and never expressed her opinions or wishes (note Gen. 21:10). It does mean that she was willing for Abraham to be the head of their family.

### II. DAUGHTERS OF SARAH HAVE A QUIET AND SERENE DIGNITY (3:2-5).

A. "Chaste conversation" (v. 2; KJV) indicates "pure

lives" (see Tit. 2:4, 5). An illustration is avoiding outlandish fashions (v. 3).

1. See the list of "beauty aids" given in Is. 3:16-25. Peter's three categories are still with us: hairdos, jewelry, and clothing.

2. Daughters of Sarah are not characterized by an addiction to fashion (Rom. 12:2), but by modesty and dignity (note 1 Tim. 2:9, 10).

B. Daughters of Sarah need not be totally unconcerned about their appearance (vv. 3-5).

1. Sarai's name was changed to "Sarah," which means "princess" (Gen. 17:15f.). She was apparently a princess in beauty (Gen. 12:14) and in bearing.
2. They do not depend on the artificial to enhance their appearance; their character enhances their appearance. They walk and talk with dignity.
  - a. "Adorn" is translated from the Greek word from which we get "cosmetics."
  - b. Daughters of Sarah are made beautiful from "inward" cosmetics one cannot buy.

### III. DAUGHTERS OF SARAH HAVE AN INNER AND UNFADING BEAUTY (3:3-6).

A. The question is the *emphasis* of one's life; v. 3 is not a prohibition, or women could not wear dresses!

1. An emphasis on the *inner* self (v. 4) and on pleasing *God*: "in the sight of God" (v. 4), "who hoped in God" (v. 5).
2. The emphasis of Sarah's life was to "do what is right" (v. 6).

B. When our priorities are spiritual rather than physical, there are at least two results:

1. We can face whatever comes, "without being frightened by any fear" (v. 6), i.e., "not terrified" (note Prov. 3:25). When persecution comes (even from a non-Christian mate), God will be with us!
2. Beauty within has nothing to do with evenness of features or smoothness of skin; time cannot erase inner beauty but only enhances it (note vv. 3-5; NIV)!

### IV. DAUGHTERS OF SARAH ARE LOVINGLY RESPECTED (3:7).

A. The pathway for husbands and wives is the same ("likewise," v. 7). Respect must be mutual.

1. "Treat them with *respect*" (NIV). The word translated "honor" in the KJV is even stronger than that. It is translated "*precious*" in 2:7. Let her know she is precious!
2. "Weaker vessel" refers to physical strength, not to worth. A fragile vase is worth more than a rusty bucket.

- B. Sarah was respected and loved—and so are her daughters (Prov. 18:22; 31:28).
1. Like her daughters after her, Sarah was “an heir” with Abraham “of the grace of life”—physically in the birth of Isaac (Ps. 127:3), spiritually in following the way of God (1:4).
  2. Abraham loved and respected her.
    - a. He respected her wishes regarding Hagar (Gen. 16:6; 21:10, 12).

- b. He placed trust in her to care for his vast household.
- c. He mourned when she died (Gen. 23:2).

#### CONCLUSION

May God bless all daughters of Sarah! Are *you* a daughter of Sarah? “You are her daughters *if* you do what is right and do not give way to fear” (v. 6; NIV).

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