

"1 PETER" (Chuck Swindoll)

THE WRITERS AND RECIPIENTS OF THE LETTER

Though Peter identifies himself as the author of the letter in 1 Peter 1:1, he later mentions, "Through Silvanus . . . I have written to briefly" (5:12). In the first-century world, this phrase often meant that the named person served as the secretary who either wrote a dictated letter or contributed to the composition of the letter under the direct authority of the primary author. This is likely the meaning here. Peter doesn't say that he sent the letter to them by means of Silvanus but that he actually wrote the letter with Silvanus's help.

Who was this Silvanus who assisted Peter in composing this great letter of hope? Silvanus, also called "Silas," is first mentioned in Acts 15:22 as a leader in the Jerusalem church, where he first met Peter. He was one of the men sent with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch bearing the results of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:27). We are told that Silas was himself a "prophet" who encouraged and strengthened the believers in Antioch upon his arrival (Acts 15:32). After Paul's abrupt falling-out with Barnabas over whether to bring John Mark on the second missionary journey (Acts 15:35-39), Paul decided to take Silas instead of Barnabas (Acts 15:40). Silas is then mentioned repeatedly during Paul's second missionary journey. He suffered persecution with Paul, rejoicing through their suffering (Acts 16:19, 25). He worked closely with Paul and Timothy in establishing and strengthening the churches throughout Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece (Acts 16-18; 2 Cor. 1:19). It's easy to forget the fact that 1 and 2 Thessalonians are written not by Paul alone, but by "Paul and Silvanus and Timothy" (1 Thes. 1:1; 2 Thes. 1:1). After his ministry with Paul and Timothy, Silas next appears with Peter in Rome (the "Babylon" of 1 Peter 5:12-13). Silas was responsible for composing and sending the letter from Peter to the churches in Asia Minor (5:12); Silas was no doubt personally acquainted with many in these congregations.

So, if Silas (Silvanus) was partly responsible for writing 1 Peter, we have a collaborative writing by both an apostle (Peter) and a prophet (Silas). The resultant letter, written in words inspired by the Holy Spirit, bears absolute authority and profound relevance for the church in every age. Although we may be able to discern the influence of Silas in this letter through various phrases that connect us to Paul's unique language and imagery, the author primarily responsible for its content is Peter.

The recipients of the letter are "those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1:1). They were scattered aliens who knew the Lord—citizens of God's kingdom living in exile in the far reaches of the world. From an earthly perspective they were refugees, but from a heavenly perspective they were "chosen." Although they were scattered by persecution, victimized by circumstances beyond their control, and wandering in the wilderness of despair, these men and women still had reason to rejoice. They were God's chosen!

The believers scattered throughout Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) included both Jewish and Gentile Christians experiencing persecution. Peter, likely writing from Rome, drew from both his Jewish background and his intercultural experience to weave together a message that would communicate to both groups. He



drew extensively on Old Testament texts and images that would be familiar to Jewish Christians. But he also reminded his Gentile readers that they were no longer ignorant and immoral (1 Pet. 1:14) but now recipients of mercy as the people of God (2:10; quoting Hos. 1:6, 9-10; 2:23).

PURPOSE AND PREVIEW OF THE LETTER

Our hope as believers must rise above the treatment we receive from those who dislike and distrust us. It must rely on the Lord and His sure promises. The point of Peter's letter, to put it simply, is that *Christ gives hope in hurtful times*. Who better to know how to keep hope ablaze in a cold world of dark despair than one who has lived his earlier life in physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual gloom?

So, throughout the book of 1 Peter we see reminders of the reality of suffering (1:6-7; 2:18-19; 3:15-16; 4:12-16; 5:8-10). The theme keeps moving to the forefront of Peter's mind. It's the message his readers needed to hear—and a message Peter was well-prepared to send. The purpose of Peter's letter was to remind the Christians that painful trials are not the end. God will frustrate His adversaries and bring about a redemptive purpose through these periods of pain. Peter reminds us of what we can so easily forget: *Christ gives hope in hurtful times*.

Peter develops this encouraging message through three movements. First, he informs his readers of their living hope (1:1-2:12). In this section, he lets us know that grace and peace can be ours as we claim our hope (1:3-12), as we walk in holiness (1:13-25), and as we grow in Christ (2:1-12). Peter highlights the grace that sustains us, describing a living hope through Christ's resurrection (1:3). *Christ becomes the source of hope in hurtful times*.

Next, Peter exhorts his readers to hopeful living in spite of their status as aliens and strangers (2:13-4:11). He urges us to submit to various authorities (2:13-3:7), to be humble in spirit (3:8-22), to be armed with endurance (4:1-6), and to glorify God (4:7-11). These principles become the key to living as Christians in a hostile world. Peter emphasizes grace to stand firm, describing a calm hope through personal submission (3:6). *Christ becomes the example of hope in hurtful times*.

Finally, Peter comforts his readers in the midst of their fiery ordeal (4:12-5:14). He reminds us not to be surprised at our difficult circumstances (4:12). Instead, we should keep rejoicing (4:13), entrust our lives to God (4:19), and cast our worries on Him (5:7). Peter encourages us with grace to rejoice, turning our attention toward a firm hope through faith (4:19). *Christ becomes the foundation of hope in hurtful times*.