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1 Peter

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1 Peter

A. Overview and Summary.

1. Peter is identified as the writer in the first verse. He writes to “pilgrims in the Dispersion” (1:1), which traditionally has meant the scattering of Jews due to persecution. But throughout the epistle, he writes to those who are spiritual pilgrims, those who are aliens to the earth whether Jew or Gentile. He identifies himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ (1:1) and as such, was one of a small group of men called by Jesus (Matthew 10:1-4) and commissioned (John 20:19-23) for ministry.
2. Due to his impetuous nature, he was often used as an example by the Lord to teach a truth. For example, in Matthew 16:16, Peter declares that Jesus “is the Christ, the Son of the Living God”. Jesus praises him and says that “My Father in heaven” revealed it to him. He then says, “You are Peter and upon this rock, I will build my church”. Jesus uses a play on words here. He calls Peter “petros,” meaning “little rock,” and then says Upon this ‘petra’ or foundational stone, I will build my church. The prevailing Protestant view is that the foundational stone is the revelation that Jesus is the Christ. The Roman Catholic Church holds the view that Peter is the foundation of the church and bases its papal doctrine on this perspective. Although Peter took a leading role in the early church, he was certainly not infallible. Only a few verses later, Jesus tells Peter “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men” (16:23). Additionally, there is no Scriptural evidence Peter ever visited Rome, the site of the present-day Vatican.
3. Peter was married, and according to church tradition, he and his wife were both martyred. Peter writes to encourage the believers who were suffering from increased persecution. This was during the reign of Nero, who burned the city of Rome to make way for his building projects. Due to the resulting outcry, he successfully shifted the blame to Christians. This caused a significant scattering “of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1:1). This would put the writing of this epistle shortly after July of 64 AD, when the city of Rome burned.

B. Chapter One.

1. After his greeting, he writes: “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1:2). Peter confirms the doctrine of the election, in that God chooses his own according to His foreknowledge.
2. He continues: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1:3-5). This is a wonderful promise, our inheritance awaits us, and the power of God keeps us.
3. Again, he writes: “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls” (1:6-9). Peter encourages the believers their present trials are for a purpose: “the salvation of their souls”. Bible scholars point out that salvation is comprised of three parts. The first “justification” is given through the new birth as a gift. The second “sanctification” is a lifelong process of growing and maturing in Christ. The final salvation is “glorification” when our resurrected bodies will be joined to our souls upon the Lord’s return.
4. Peter gives us an understanding of what the Old Testament writers under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit wrote of what the New Covenant would bring: “Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into” (1:10-12). Even the angels did not understand this. As those of the New Covenant, we are truly blessed!
5. He charges us to “gird up the loins of our minds” (1:13a), and to be holy because God is Holy (1:15b). Peter writes: “And if you call on the Father, who without

partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1:17-19). The New Testament frequently tells us we will be judged according to our works (Matthew 16:27; 2nd Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 22:12). This is not for our eternal destiny; we will spend eternity with God and Jesus, and salvation is a gift (Ephesians 2:8-9). But we will be judged on how we have cooperated with the Holy Spirit regarding our sanctification. This is the "fear" referenced here and is to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12).

6. He closes the chapter with words about our brief time upon this earth compared with the eternal Word of God, which endures forever (1:24-25).

C. Chapter Two.

1. The chapter opens with Peter charging us to "lay aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious" (2:1-3). It is interesting that Peter mentions the Word as pure milk (in Greek, Gala) while Paul criticized the Corinthians for being able only to drink milk and not being able to eat meat (in Greek, Broma) (1 Corinthians 3:1-3). Milk means the basic, elemental teachings of Christianity, while meat means the more solid, complete, and more profound spiritual doctrines of the Christian faith. Peter may have had a sense that his recipients were less mature in their faith and needed to grow by drinking the pure milk of the Word.
2. He continues with: "Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (2:4-5). Christ as the living stone is the foundational stone upon which the believers are built. It is apparent that Peter understood the analogy that he is a stone (Matthew 16:16). Peter continues by quoting from Psalm 118:22: "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone".
3. Peter gives a word of encouragement: "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once

were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy” (2:9-10). He goes on to admonish his readers to “abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul” (2:11b). He also instructs “Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good” (2:13-14). This does not mean blind submission. As Peter himself says “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29b) when they were told not to speak of Jesus by the Jewish council.

4. The chapter concludes with: “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ‘Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth’; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (2:23-25). Peter quotes Isaiah 53 here, showing that although he was an unlearned man (Acts 4:13), he was not illiterate, but had been trained in the Hebrew Bible in the synagogue.

D. Chapter Three.

1. Peter opens the chapter with a word to wives: “Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel— rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God” (3:1-4).
2. He continues with a word to husbands: “Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered” (3:7).
3. This is followed by a word to all: “Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing” (3:8-9).

4. He gives a word about being ready to defend your faith: But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with gentleness and respect” (3:15). The phrase translated “to give a defense” in Greek is “apologian” from which we get the theological term “apologetics” which is a practice of defense of the Christian faith. Peter instructs those who are apologists to defend with gentleness and respect. Fighting with someone will not win them over to your position. However, we should always be ready to give a proper answer to their questions.
5. He then gives insight into Christ’s soul going to Hades while he was in the tomb: “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water” (3:18-20). Within the context of the passage, many Bible scholars interpret the “spirits in prison” as the fallen angels who sinned before the flood by co-habiting with human females with the result of producing the Nephilim, the giants of old (Geneses 6). Jesus went and “preached” to them indicates His victory. We will discuss this again in 2nd Peter, Jude and Revelation.
6. Peter uses the eight souls saved through water as an illustration of baptism. He is not saying that baptism saves us, but rather that baptism is an analogy of being buried with Christ as we go into the water and being raised with Him in newness of life (Romans 6:3-4). Noah’s ark represents Christ, and the eight souls inside the ark were saved from God’s wrath, which came upon all humanity outside of it.

E. Chapter Four.

1. Peter opens the chapter with a word about following Christ’s example in suffering and we who used to walk in the sins of the flesh: “when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries” (4:3b). He then tells his readers those who do those things think it strange we do not walk in the same dissipation. He then gives a difficult passage to interpret: “They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this reason, the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit” (4:5-6). Those who are continuing to walk in dissipation, the unsaved, will be judged. They may live many years without consequences. Still, God will judge them. The

difficult portion is “the gospel was preached also to those who are dead”. This does not refer to the spirits in Hades in the previous chapter. Nor does it give a second chance to those who are already dead. The prevailing interpretation is that these are believers to whom the gospel was preached and then died. “They will live according to God in the spirit”.

2. Peter continues with a word about serving to God’s glory: “But the end of all things is at hand; therefore, be serious and watchful in your prayers. And above all things have fervent love for one another, for ‘love will cover a multitude of sins.’ Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (4:7-9). The early church believed the end of all things was very near. We too should live in such an expectation.
3. He continues with a word of encouragement about suffering: “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part, He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people’s matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter” (4:12-16).
4. The chapter closes with “For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?” (4:17). Those who do not obey the gospel will suffer the full fury of God’s wrath. These are the unbelievers. But Peter is saying judgment begins with us, the house of God. He expects His children to walk in holiness and fellowship with Him. He will discipline us if we do not do so (1 Corinthians 11:32).

F. Chapter Five.

1. Peter opens the final chapter with a word to the elders: “The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you,

but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away” (5:1-4). An elder who possesses the attributes as described by Paul in 1st Timothy chapter three and Titus chapter one, will be one who does these things.

2. Peter gives a word to young people and to all of us: “Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, But, gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (5:5-6).
3. He moves towards closing with these words: Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen” (5:8-11).
4. The final verses by mention of a Silvanus, who may have been his scribe. He then uses a peculiar reference to “she who is in Babylon” (5:13a) as greeting them. It could be Peter is purposefully not mentioning her name as well as the city due to persecution that could happen to her.

G. Discussion Questions, Application and Passing it on.

1. Was the narrative about Peter in Matthew 16:16 helpful in providing insight on the false teaching of the Roman Catholic Church which says that Peter was the first Pope?
2. Do you have a sense that when you are suffering for His sake, you are being refined like gold to make you more holy?
3. Do you understand the three steps of salvation? Are you working diligently on your sanctification? What steps might that involve?
4. Are you always ready to give a defense of what you believe? How could you be more prepared?
5. Do you consider yourself first regarding “let judgment begin with the house of God”? What sins do you need to address?

This New Testament survey was provided by Joshua Nations (JoshuaNations.org)