



## Christian Origins #89 - 1 Peter

by Ronald L. Dart

Nearly everyone knows the first four books of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. But there's something *odd* about that, when you consider how prominent Peter was among the disciples of Jesus; how he was almost always the first one to speak; how he seems to be, in all the gospels, the first one mentioned in any listing of the apostles; and the history we have of how he is a chief apostle and a leader among the Apostles. You would kind of expect, when you come to this, that it would read: Matthew, *Peter*, Luke, and John, instead.

All we have, though, from Peter is two short letters; and beyond their content we know little about them. His letter is addressed to scattered Christians, mainly Gentile, in the region we today would call Turkey. The letter was almost certainly prompted by the same historical events that prompted James to write his letter about the same time. It's very evident, when you lay those two letters... (they're right next to each other in the New Testament), they seem to have been written about the same time, and both of them deal with widespread persecution and the importance of Christian people learning how to survive, to endure persecution, and to become stronger through it.

It's easy to forget, living in a country that cherishes freedom of religion, that it has not always been so. There have been times in history when it was *worth your life* to confess that you were a Christian. It probably will be again. Peter wrote this letter from one of two locations: He may have been in Rome; he may have been in Babylon. He mentions Babylon toward the end of the letter, but many people think that that's kind of a code for Rome, in the style the Book of Revelation uses. In other words, when the Christians spoke of "Babylon", they were actually talking about Rome. It was a nickname, as it were, for the city.

There's a very strong historical tradition that Peter died in Rome along with Paul, and actually that would probably be more consistent with these letters being written to Turkey, as they are. In other words, coming from Babylon—way over in Mesopotamia—the area around Turkey would have really been out of Peter's purview. If he's in Rome, it's very much a part of the overall area that's being worked with by the Apostles at that time. But there was a large Jewish colony in Babylon at this time, so Peter going there as the Apostle to the Jews would make a lot of sense. No one knows for certain.

Catholics like having Peter in Rome. They see him as the first pope, and it creates a line of successive Roman bishops who have led the church from the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Unfortunately, the Roman Church is its own historian, and it has a vested interest in Peter being the first pope. Some Protestants don't like the idea of having Peter in Rome, because they don't accept apostolic succession. And they have to struggle with this passage in Matthew 16, where Jesus said:

### Matthew 16

KJ2000

<sup>18</sup> And I say also unto you, That you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church[...]

<sup>19</sup> And I will give unto you the keys of the kingdom of heaven[...]

And all the stuff about being able to bind stuff on earth is very troublesome to some Protestants. The fact is, Peter being the first bishop of Rome says nothing whatsoever about any presumed line of succession. There was nothing to prevent the second or third bishop from becoming totally apostate, so it really isn't very relevant. And, in the end, it certainly doesn't matter very much for our understanding of Peter's letters. Once we understand that there was fairly widespread persecution, and both James and Peter took in hand to write and encourage Christians going through it, we basically have a grip on what this letter is about.

As was Paul's custom at times, Peter seems to have dictated this letter. We even know the name of the scribe; his name is Silvanus, or Silas. Silvanus is *probably* the reason the letter is written with such excellent Greek style. Some of the commentators, in looking at it, say, "Oh, Peter couldn't have written that. He was a fisherman from Galilee. The Greek is too good." But, again bear in mind, Peter is walking back and forth dictating this thing. And for all we know, he may have been dictating in Aramaic. Whereas Silvanus was actually writing it down in Greek, translating as he went. We don't really know how it happened. Nevertheless, when you read this, the voice is the voice of Peter—one of those Apostles closest to Jesus.

So we pick up someone else's mail, as we've been doing, and we read Peter's letter. And he starts off by saying:

### 1 Peter 1

AKJV

<sup>1</sup> Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,

<sup>2</sup> Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, to obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you, and peace, be multiplied.

<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

You know, this is really interesting the way Peter puts this here. It's not exactly what we expect him to say (and we wouldn't want to make *too* much of the figures of speech that Peter uses). But he says he has "begotten us again"—he's given us new life, as it were—and he's done this by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The very *fact* of Jesus' resurrection means *death can't hold us*. He's begotten us:

### 1 Peter 1

AKJV

<sup>4</sup> To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you,

<sup>5</sup> Who are kept by the power of God through faith to salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

You know, these long sentences are worthy of the apostle Paul. That's just the way they wrote, I think, in those days. Peter says:

### 1 Peter 1

AKJV

<sup>6</sup> Wherein you greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, you are in heaviness through manifold temptations:

<sup>7</sup> That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found to praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

You know, this really is counterintuitive in that a person who doesn't have the background—doesn't have the knowledge or the understanding of what Peter is driving at—would really *wonder* about this. Whenever you become a Christian, you would sort of think, “Well, now God's on my side. Life ought to work better for me.” If that's the case, how come bad things happen to Christian people? And I don't mean just bad things happen to *bad* Christian people; I mean bad things happen to *good* Christian people. Why does that sort of thing take place? Because Peter acknowledges it. He said you can be “in heaviness through manifold temptation”, and you can have your faith being *tried in the fire*. But, in the end, “found to praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ”.

You know, one of the things you have to learn when you read things like this is that God is not in the business of preserving human flesh. He is quite willing to see human flesh *destroyed* in order that something greater than that might come of it. God is in the process of making us *like him*. We have to go through trials and problems in this world because God is in the process of building *character* in us. And so Peter says, like James said, “You rejoice, even though for a time you're in heaviness through manifold temptations. You know that the trials of your faith is...”

### 1 Peter 1

AKJV

<sup>7</sup> [...] found to praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

<sup>8</sup> Whom having not seen, you love;

It's amazing, isn't it, in a way—how we can love someone that we have never seen, we've never encountered, never had an exchange of conversation? But these people, up in Cappadocia and so forth, had never seen Jesus; they had only *heard* about him. In fact, they had probably at this point in time not even read one of the gospel accounts. But they had heard men like Peter, who would sit down and sit around the campfire at night, or sit around the table in the home, and tell the story over and over and over again. And the growing awareness of who Jesus *was* in the flesh, of what he went *through* in the flesh, how he died and was raised from the dead, and how he did these things out of his love for us, generated a love *back* to Christ.

### 1 Peter 1

AKJV

<sup>8</sup> Whom having not seen, you love; in whom, though now you see him not, yet believing, you rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:

<sup>9</sup> Receiving the end [*the objective*] of your faith[....]

What's that? It's the salvation of *your life*.

### 1 Peter 1

AKJV

<sup>10</sup> Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come to you:

And it's really interesting to do a study of Old Testament prophecies because, again and again, you find Christ prophesied; you find the prophecies of the grace that is yet to come upon mankind. And these prophets searched what, or what manner of time, the spirit of Christ which was in them was signifying. They wanted to know. They searched it; they looked; they studied.

### 1 Peter 1

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<sup>11</sup> Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify,

when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.

<sup>12</sup> To whom it was revealed, that not to themselves, but to us they did minister the things, [...]

Peter suggests that Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, and all the rest of them *realized* that these things were not for them. They weren't ministering to themselves. They were ministering to a generation off into the future. They ministered these things unto us

**1 Peter 1**

*KJ2000*

<sup>12</sup> [...] which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

Think of that. You know, you would sort of think that the angels—going and coming from God's throne—would know *all* of the stuff; that they would know it all because they're right there at the headquarters. But the fact is, the Angels *find out* things when God reveals them to his servants right here on this planet. Hard to imagine, isn't it, that you might go to church someday and be sitting there, and unbeknownst to you are an angel sitting to your right, and another to your left, waiting to hear what the Spirit of God is revealing through his prophets. So says Peter, when you understand all this stuff:

**1 Peter 1**

*KJ2000*

<sup>13</sup> Therefore gird up the loins of your mind,

That's an interesting figure of speech, kind of lost on us today. But to "gird up your loins" in biblical terms...those fellows wore something like a kilt in those days—they didn't wear trousers. And whenever they got ready to do some extreme work or had to run or something, they would gird up their loins—which basically meant you reach down, you pull the thing between your legs and up, and tuck it into the belt or the girdle around the waist, and kind of turn your kilt into a pair of running shorts. So Peter says:

**1 Peter 1**

*KJ2000*

<sup>13</sup> Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

You've got a challenge ahead of you. You've got work to do. You've got a race to run, so turn that kilt around your waist into running shorts and get ready.

**1 Peter 1**

*AKJV*

<sup>14</sup> As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance:

<sup>15</sup> But as he which has called you is holy, so be you holy in all manner of conversation;

<sup>16</sup> Because it is written, Be you holy; for I am holy.

And right here, Peter goes to the core of it. What God wants is for us to *be like him*. And I'll tell you, to make the transition from being very human, ordinary, profane into *holy* requires a certain amount of overhaul. It doesn't happen by God rewiring your brain, you know. It doesn't just happen when he takes the the lid off of you, and reaches inside and changes some dip switches. Actually, what has to

happen for a human being to become holy is, he's going to have to go through a training period. He's going to have to suffer some pain. He's going to have to learn some lessons. He's going to have to lift some weights. This is how it's done. He says:

**1 Peter 1**

KJ2000

<sup>17</sup> And if you call on the Father, who without respect of persons judges according to every man's work, [...]

He don't care who you are. He's going to judge you by how you perform.

**1 Peter 1**

AKJV

<sup>17</sup> [...] pass the time of your exile here in fear:

<sup>18</sup> Since you know that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain manner of life received by tradition from your fathers;

<sup>19</sup> But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:

You know, I'm sure a lot of people have no idea what this really means when it speaks of "being redeemed". We know what it means to redeem coupons, or to redeem stamps, for something. We understand the concept of commercial redemption. What we don't understand, though, is that in the Old Testament (and this is where this allusion is drawn from) the circumstances under which a man had to be redeemed were really *dire*. What happened, generally speaking, to a person: They would commit a crime. If you went out for example, and stole a sheep, the law required that you, under different circumstances, restore four or five sheep for the sheep that you stole. Well, you know, if a guy *had* four or five sheep he probably wouldn't have stolen the one he got in the first place. So it was probably pretty rare that a person, having stolen the sheep, would be able to restore fourfold, right?

So, what happened was: They took him down, put him up on the auction block, and sold him as a slave. (Oh, yeah. Slavery was allowed. There were no prisons in this society.) They sold him to a man for the price of the four sheep he couldn't pay. And he went over, and he worked for this man for whatever period of time it took to work off his debt—not only to pay his debt to the person that had to get paid off, but also to pay the man who bought him for his trouble (because he had a right to something, as well). The maximum time, by the way, he could serve would be six years in Israel. And that's the way it was done. So people were paid off; these things came through.

*However*, there was an exception to this: If you went out and stole the sheep, and all of a sudden they found you out with the thing, and now they took you down to the auction block and sold you to some fellow—to work for him for four, five, or six years to pay off the total cost of your debt to society—the Bible made provision for your near-kinsmen (your brother) to come down there. He could come down and pay the cost. Whatever it was that you went for on the auction block—however many shekels it was—your brother could come down and *redeem* you. He could buy you out of slavery by paying the price of the sin—the crime—that you committed. It was a provision of Israelite law.

So when, in the New Testament, when we find this word "redeem" coming along, it's coming about to tell us you had sold yourself into sin. And you've got to be bought back out of that. And not just anybody can do this. In ancient Israel, a stranger had no right to redeem you once you're bought into slavery. They couldn't buy you out of it. But your brother could, your kinsmen could—your next of kin. In *this* situation, we can be bought back—not with silver, not with gold:

**1 Peter 1**

AKJV

- <sup>19</sup> But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:  
<sup>20</sup> Who truly was foreordained before the foundation of the world, [...]

Right from the very start, God knew he was going to have to do this, because human beings were free. And if they were free, they were going to sin. And if they sin, they were going into slavery. So he had to make provision from the start as to how he was going to buy them out of it. Christ was...

**1 Peter 1**

AKJV

- <sup>20</sup> [...] foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you,  
<sup>21</sup> Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.  
<sup>22</sup> Seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit to unfeigned love of the brothers, see that you love one another with a pure heart fervently:

You know, I've sometimes been asked, "How is it possible to come to love God, whom I can't see, I can't touch. I can talk to him in prayer, but he doesn't talk to me. God seems so *distant*?" I think it's John who says [1 John 4:20], "You've got to learn to love your brother whom you *do* see. Because if you can't love your brother whom you *do* see, there's no way you're going to love God whom you *can't* see."—that it is, in the process of loving our brother who has Christ *in him*, that we learn to love Christ himself.

**1 Peter 1**

AKJV

- <sup>22</sup> [...] See that you love one another with a pure heart fervently:  
<sup>23</sup> Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which lives and stays for ever.  
<sup>24</sup> For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass wither, and the flower thereof falls away:  
<sup>25</sup> But the word of the Lord endures for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached to you.

Flesh isn't going to last. The Word of God *is* going to last, so you need to internalize that Word. *It* will carry you through. He continues, in chapter two:

**1 Peter 2**

KJ2000

- <sup>1</sup> Therefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speaking,

Forget about spin. Forget about excuses. Forget about pretense. It's time to be honest.

**1 Peter 2**

KJ2000

- <sup>2</sup> As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby:  
<sup>3</sup> If so be you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

<sup>4</sup> To whom coming, as unto a living stone, rejected indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious,

<sup>5</sup> You also [*just like Christ was a living stone*], as living stones, are built up into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

It's interesting the way he develops this, because what he is doing is borrowing from the analogy of the Temple and the physical sacrifices offered there, to make these Gentile Christians understand that that's not where the worship of God is today. "That you, built up as a church, are lively stones—a holy priesthood—and you offer up *spiritual* sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

### 1 Peter 2

KJ2000

<sup>6</sup> Therefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious: and he that believes on him shall not be confounded.

Peter has turned to the scriptures for this **[Isaiah 28:16]**.

### 1 Peter 2

AKJV

<sup>7</sup> To you therefore which believe he is precious: but to them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner,

<sup>8</sup> And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

I don't know if you caught that, just a moment ago, but it is really interesting how he draws the contrast here. "Unto you therefore who *believe*, he is precious. Unto those who are *disobedient*, the stone is a stone of stumbling." What he is doing here is drawing a contrast between belief and disobedience. Normally, you would think between belief and unbelief. But, you see, the way Peter uses the expression, there is no difference; unbelief and disobedience go together like belief and obedience do.

### 1 Peter 2

AKJV

<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that you should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light;

<sup>10</sup> Which in time past were not a people, [...]

They weren't. God didn't look upon the Gentiles.

### 1 Peter 2

AKJV

<sup>10</sup> [...] but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

At this point, Peter shift gears. Actually, he returns to the theme he's after in this letter, which is talking to these people about the circumstances they find themselves in—the persecution, the difficult life. He says:

## 1 Peter 2

AKJV

<sup>11</sup> Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, [...]

In other words, “You don’t really belong in this world. You’re just passing through it.” He says:

## 1 Peter 2

KJ2000

<sup>11</sup> [...] abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;

<sup>12</sup> Having your conduct honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

In other words, what he’s telling these people is, “You’re going through a very difficult time now. Be *really careful* to maintain honest conduct among the Gentiles. They’re speaking evil of you, but the time is going to come when they’re going to *have* to glorify God when they see how you live your life.” And then he says something *really fascinating*. He says:

## 1 Peter 2

AKJV

<sup>13</sup> Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme;

<sup>14</sup> Or to governors, as to them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.

<sup>15</sup> For so is the will of God, that with well doing you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men:

Now, what’s going on here? What he is suggesting is that it’s important for Christians to be *law-abiding citizens*. There’s a strange story that is told about the burning of Rome. I don’t know how much you recall about it—the old story about Nero having burned Rome himself, or fiddling while Rome burns, and so forth—but the Christians, as you probably well know, were *blamed* for the burning of Rome, and there was a terrible martyrdom that went on in Rome after that happened. One of the reasons why this took place was because the Christians, who for a very long time had heard prophecies about the fall of Rome—Rome was looked upon as the Great Whore, the Great Harlot, sitting upon many waters [**Revelation 17:1**]*—and that they knew* the judgment of God was going to come upon Rome.

Well, when the city caught fire and began to burn, Christians thought this was the judgment of God upon Rome. They thought the return of Christ was imminent. They could see all kinds of prophecies being fulfilled. And so, Christians were very excited. They had been seen dancing in the street. They had been seen (and heard, actually) condemning Rome and talking about the evil things that were going to come upon Rome. Naturally, some people thought they were *happy* to see the city burned, and maybe they had even been the cause of the fire. And so, persecution descended upon the Christian church.

This is one of the reasons why Paul, in **Romans 13** (and now the same general idea is in 1 Peter) says that we should submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake. We should be good citizens in our community, because that’s one of the reasons why we get ourselves into trouble. When we rejoice at the downfall of people...you know, why should we, as Christians, be dancing around the street over a city burning? Just because we believe it’s the judgment of God, just because we believe the return of Christ is near, can’t we find—couldn’t we find, somehow—the milk of human kindness? To be sorry that people were losing their homes? To be sorry that children were dying in these fires? To be sorry about

the terrible loss? Even when the judgment of God comes in all justice upon wicked men, it's not the time for Christians to dance in the streets. He says:

**1 Peter 2**

AKJV

<sup>15</sup> For so is the will of God, that with well doing you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men:

<sup>16</sup> As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.

Christians? Malice? Yeah, I'm afraid so. I'm afraid it's very *easy* for self-righteousness to enter the picture, for us to look down our noses at other people, and actually feel *malice* when we watch wicked men getting their just deserts.

**1 Peter 2**

AKJV

<sup>17</sup> Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

What are we to make of this? Well, basically, he says: Be good citizens. Honor your government. Don't go around spouting all this stuff. Don't let people think that you may even be one of those that brought him down.

**1 Peter 2**

AKJV

<sup>18</sup> Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the fraudulent [*KJV "froward"; perverse*]

<sup>19</sup> For this is thank worthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.

<sup>20</sup> For what glory is it, if, when you be buffeted for your faults, you shall take it patiently? [*Who's going to give you credit for that?*] but if, when you do well, and suffer for it, you take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.

But, you see, there's a little background item in here that you need to know: When you're the underdog, when you're the oppressed, it's not necessarily a good idea to spit in the eye of the people who are oppressing you. According to the scriptures, we ought to be good citizens and good servants, and not bring this kind of stuff on ourselves.

Until next time, I'm Ronald Dart, and don't forget: You were *born to win*.

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