Background Study of 1 Peter

First Peter belongs to that section of the New Testament known as the "General Epistles" or "Catholic Epistles." This section includes James, the Petrine Epistles, the Johannine Epistles, and Jude (some would classify Hebrews here as well). The term, "Catholic" is a transliteration of the Greek term *katholikai* that has been used to describe these letters since the early third century. Though there are differences of opinion on the precise meaning of this term, it seems to mean something akin to "general."[1] These letters, unlike those of Paul, are not addressed to a single, specific congregation or individual, but seem to be addressed to a wide, sometimes unidentified body of Christians. First Peter "is not a general epistle in the sense that it was sent out to the entire church, but it was intended for a larger group than most of the New Testament epistles, which were usually written to a single congregation."[2] Though these letters have been treasured by the church for centuries, J. Daryl Charles rightly observes that presently they "have the dubious distinction of being the Rodney Dangerfield of the New Testament corpus,"[3] referring to Dangerfield's signature line, "I don't get no respect." Indeed, it seems that these New Testament epistles have suffered great neglect by both the academy and the church. A comparison of the amount of scholarly works devoted to the gospels and/or Pauline epistles with those devoted to the General Epistles would reveal a great imbalance. Nor are the bulk of these letters given much attention in the teaching and preaching ministries of the church. Because of this neglect, John Elliott referred to 1 Peter as an "exegetical stepchild."[4] Where recent attention has been given to the General Epistles, it seems to have been directed more toward a critical analysis of authorship and background information rather than to a proper exegesis of the texts themselves. For this reason, Stephen Neill referred to 1 Peter as "the storm center of New Testament studies."[5] What Wayne Grudem states about the present state of studies on 1 Peter applies equally to the entire section of the General Epistles:

> They almost uniformly attempt to draw conclusions based on far too little data. Perhaps it is time to admit that the requisite evidence for answering such questions is simply not available to us, and that good stewardship of the time and skills which God has given us would seem to require that we give more attention to the text itself, not primarily to determine its original setting and sources, but to ascertain its meaning for Peter and his original readers, and then its proper application to our own lives.[6]

---

[1] Curtis Vaughan and Thomas Lea *1, 2 Peter, Jude* (Bible Study Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 5. The term "Catholic" is in use for these letters by the time of Origen, ca. 185-254 AD.
[2] Everett F. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 371.
[3] J. Daryl Charles, "Interpreting the General Epistles," in *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues*, (ed. David Alan Black and David S. Dockery. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 433.
[4] John H. Elliott, "First Epistle of Peter" in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ed. David Noel Freeman. New York: Anchor, 1992), 5:169-278. Cited in Erland Waltner and J. Daryl Charles, *1-2 Peter, Jude* (Believers Church Bible Commentary; Scottdale, Penn.: Herald, 1999), 18.
[5] Stephen Neill, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 343. Cited in Waltner and Charles, 17.
[6] Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 17; Downer's Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1988), 10.

Ceslas Spicq says of 1 Peter that it is "the most condensed New Testament résumé of the Christian and of the conduct that it inspires," and that it is "a model of a 'pastoral letter.'"[7] Harrison notes, "Among the so-called Catholic Epistles none has been more widely used or more highly respected during the history of the church than this one attributed to Simon Peter."[8] The book was highly esteemed and frequently cited by the Reformers and the Anabaptists. The latter were undoubtedly comforted and strengthened by Peter's discussion of holding fast to the faith in the midst of suffering, while the former found it a treasure of New Testament doctrine. Martin Luther said of this letter, "The one who understands this letter has without doubt enough so as not to need more … because the apostle did not forget anything in this letter that is necessary for a Christian to know."[9] In Luther's estimation, "this epistle of Peter is one of the grandest of the New Testament, and it is the true, pure gospel," for in it, "he inculcates the true doctrine of faith, —how Christ has been given to us, who takes away our sins and saves us."[10]

Sadly, today many Christians in the West seem unable to relate to 1 Peter with its emphasis on suffering hardship and injustice with patient confidence in God. As Jobes points out, "We have been fortunate enough to live in societies where, generally speaking, Christian faith does not lower social standing, jeopardize livelihoods, or threaten life itself."[11] A majority of Christians in the world today and throughout Church history may, however, more easily identify with the conditions of Peter's letter than they can with the conditions of the contemporary American church. Persecutions still abound elsewhere (and some to a severe degree), and where they do Christian people resonate with the message of 1 Peter. For instance, "In former Yugoslavia and Muslim Indonesia, 1 Peter is said to be the most popular book among Christians."[12] If trends continue in their present direction, the onset of Christians suffering for their faith may be imminent in America and the rest of the West as well. Therefore, the time is right for us to become reacquainted with 1 Peter in preparation for the difficult days that may be in store for the church in the near future.

I. Authorship

In the present day, few books of the Bible face more criticism in terms of the identity of their author than 1 Peter. This is indeed a surprising and recent turn of events, since in antiquity the book was always affirmed to be a genuine writing of the Apostle Peter. Authorship was virtually uncontested for the first 1800 years of this letter's existence, only coming into question in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The letter claims to be from Peter in its opening statement (1:1). In 5:1, the author identifies himself as a "witness of Christ's sufferings," which would indicate one of the apostles or their closest associates, and it would certainly be a fitting description of Peter. Therefore, the burden of proof would rest on the shoulders of those who seek to deny Petrine authorship. Though many have attempted to shoulder this burden, none have been able to successfully and conclusively set forth a better alternative than the original claim of Peter's work. In examining the case for authorship, we must consider the internal evidence,

[7] Ceslas Spicq, *Les Epitres de Saint Pierre.* Cited in Edmund Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter: The Way of the Cross* (The Bible Speaks Today; Downer's Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1988), 15.
[8] Harrison, 371.
[9] Cited in Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 64 n.666.
[10] Martin Luther, *Commentary on Peter & Jude* (trans. & ed. John Nichols Lenker. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1990), 10.
[11] Karen Jobes, *1 Peter* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 1-2.
[12] Scot McNight, *1 Peter* (NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 35. Cited in Jobes, 2.

external evidence, the objections which are frequently offered against Petrine authorship, and the responses that can be offered to each.

A. Internal Evidence

As stated above, the letter is attributed to Peter in its first verse (1:1). This claim is corroborated by the claim that the author is an eyewitness to Christ's sufferings (5:1). Peter was present during Jesus' trial (Matt 26:58, 67-69; Mark 14:54; Luke 22:54, 61) and at the various confrontations with religious authorities during His earthly ministry. This adds a weight of eyewitness credibility to his statement in 2:23 that "while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously." Though evidence is lacking to confirm it with certainty, Peter may have observed the crucifixion from a safe distance, adding eyewitness detail to his statement in 2:24: "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross."

The details found in 5:12-13 may also validate Peter's authorship of the epistle as well. If "Babylon" is understood to be a cryptic reference to Rome (see discussion on provenance below), it fits with traditional information that Peter spent time in Rome at the end of his life (and perhaps before this also). This would also explain the presence of Mark and Silvanus (Silas), the frequent companion of Paul, with him. Tradition and Scripture place all of them in Rome at various times. There are strong ties between Mark and Peter in tradition, with some identifying Peter as the source behind Mark's Gospel.

B. External Evidence

The first reference found to 1 Peter is in 2 Peter 3:1, where the writer claims to be writing a "second letter." In its opening verse 2 Peter is also attributed to Peter, and the reference in 3:1 would easily be understood as a claim that both are from the same writer. Some would call this a moot point, since arguments against Peter's authorship of 2 Peter go back even to the earliest centuries of church history. Eusebius, writing in 325 AD, notes that the authenticity 2 Peter was disputed by some in the early church.[13] As Schreiner rightly observes, "Even if 2 Peter is pseudonymous (which I dispute), the reference is almost certainly to 1 Peter, suggesting that the first letter is genuinely Petrine."[14] Grudem adds, "Whether or not one thinks that Peter wrote 2 Peter, 2 Peter 3:1 can still be understood as a very early testimony to the fact that an earlier letter claiming to be from Peter (and widely accepted as that) was known and was in circulation at the time 2 Peter was written."[15] A fake letter writer would certainly appeal to a letter which was unquestionably authentic as a means of verification rather than to one which was disputed.[16]

Additionally, when 1 Peter is compared to the sermons of Peter in Acts, there are many similarities in wording, style, content, and emphasis. There are at least fifteen of these parallels.

---

[13] Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History: Complete and Unabridged, New Updated Edition* (trans C. F. Cruse; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2001), 91 (3.25.3).
[14] Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude* (The New American Commentary 37; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 22. The parenthetical remark is original.
[15] Grudem, 22. The parenthetical remark is original.
[16] It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss the authorship of 2 Peter, but suffice to say that there are strong arguments in favor of its authenticity, though it was less than certain in some quarters in the ancient church.

Among the more compelling of these is the use of the word *xulon*, literally meaning "wood," to refer to the cross. This unusual term is found twice in the sermons of Peter in Acts (5:30; 10:39), and the same usage is employed in 1 Peter 2:24. Additionally, the reference to Psalm 118 in 2:4 is paralleled in Peter's address in Acts 4:11. Selwyn notes, "Few would suggest that the parallels of thought and phrase between the speeches and I Peter are based on Saint Luke's reading of the Epistle."[17] Therefore, the parallels may serve a dual function of validating the authenticity of both Acts and 1 Peter.

Turning to the Patristic writings of the early church, one finds early and widespread awareness of 1 Peter's content in addition to attribution of Petrine authorship. Parallels in substance and wording have been claimed to be found in 1 Clement (ca. 95 AD), The Epistle of Barnabas (late first to early second century), Hermas (early to mid-second century), *The Gospel of Truth* (widely ascribed to the heretic Valentinus around 140 AD), The Epistle to Diognetus (mid to late second century), Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* (mid-second century), The Letter from Vienna and Lyons (ca. 178 AD), and the writings of Theophilus of Antioch (late second century). For example, 1 Clement "cites almost verbatim the greeting in 1 Peter, refers to 'the precious blood of Christ' (1:19), and uses two of 1 Peter's Old Testament quotations (Proverbs 10:12; 3:34)."[18] Scholars have observed up to twenty such parallels between Clement and 1 Peter,[19] with Thiessen finding Clement quoting "freely from every chapter the Epistle."[20] There is more evidence for the use of 1 Peter in the writing of the *Didache* (late first or early second century), but still less than necessary to establish certain dependence. The similarities between these writings and Peter are intriguing for the discussion but cannot be considered "proof" that these writers knew and made use of 1 Peter. The earliest writers of the post-apostolic period "were not accustomed to quote the books of the New Testament by name, or to reproduce the words with exactness."[21]

Polycarp's letter to the Philippians is the earliest extant extrabiblical writing that shows clear dependence on 1 Peter (ca. 112-114 AD). Though he does not mention Peter by name as his source, in no less than four passages, his wording is remarkably similar to that of 1 Peter, including very close quotations of 1 Peter 1:3 and 1:8. Concerning these and other parallels in Polycarp's Philippian letter, Caffin writes, "There are so many undoubted quotations from this Epistle that the modern assailants of its authenticity have no resource but to attack (without any sufficient grounds) the genuineness of Polycarp's epistle."[22] Some measure of credibility may be added to the testimony of Polycarp in that he was baptized as early as 69 AD, was known to be an associate (if not a disciple) of the Apostle John, and was bishop of Smyrna, located in the province of Asia addressed by Peter in 1:1.[23] It is possible that 1 Peter even passed through the very congregation Polycarp would later serve on its initial circuit in Asia Minor. Had 1 Peter

[17] E. G. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1946), 36. Cited in Simon J. Kistemaker, *James, Epistles of John, Peter, and Jude* (New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 7.
[18] Waltner and Charles, 176.
[19] Caffin speaks of 15 while Harnack notes 20.
[20] Henry C. Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 280.
[21] Caffin, iv.
[22] Caffin, iv-v. Parenthetical material, original.
[23] Norman Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude* (New International Biblical Commentary 16; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1992), 1; Caffin, iv.

circulated fraudulently, or been written as late as some claim, it seems impossible to believe that Polycarp would have made reference to it.

Though the writings of Papias (who died ca. 130 AD) have not survived for our examination, Eusebius indicates that Papias "made use of testimonies from the first epistle of John and likewise from that of Peter."[24] Later in the second century, Irenaeus (ca. 185 AD), Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria (both around 200), all quote from 1 Peter and refer to the Apostle Peter as its author. Origen (in the first half of the 200s) makes frequent use of it and "says expressly that it was accepted by all as genuine."[25]

Though 1 Peter is not listed in the Muratorian Canon nor in the Canon of Marcion, there are reasonable explanations for these omissions. Marcion was a heretic who denied the authority of certain New Testament writings which were held as authentic by Christians. He only claimed divine inspiration for the Pauline Epistles. Though Marcion did not mention 1 Peter, "there is evidence that he knew it."[26] The Muratorian Canon (also known as the Muratorian Fragment) is widely believed to have been partially destroyed, and it is no stretch of fancy to imagine that 1 Peter may have been included on the missing part of it. Its omission therein is therefore "not crucial, for at this general period or shortly thereafter the book is attested as Peter's by Ireaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian."[27]

When taken as a whole, the ancient external evidence is overwhelmingly affirmative of Peter as the author of 1 Peter. It seems to have never been doubted in the early church. Eusebius (in 325) acknowledges, "As to the writings of Peter, one of his epistles called the first is acknowledged as genuine. This was anciently used by the ancient fathers in their writings as an undoubted work of the apostle."[28] Curtis Vaughan notes, "no book of the New Testament has earlier, better, or stronger attestation in the post-apostolic period."[29]

C. Objections and Responses

With the dawn of so-called "higher-critical methods" in the nineteenth century, 1 Peter and many other books of Scripture have came fire from skeptical scholars. Those who deny or question Peter's authorship of this epistle typically advance their position on several specific claims. Those claims and responses thereto follow.

1. The Style of the Greek Language Used in 1 Peter

Peter was a Jewish fisherman from the region of Galilee. In Acts 4:13, he is described (with John) by the Council of scribes, elders and priests in Jerusalem as being "uneducated (Greek, *agrammatos*) and untrained (Greek, *idiotes*)." The Greek word *agrammatos* is often understood to mean "illiterate," closely paralleled in the context by the pejorative term *idiotes*, from which

[24] Eusebius, 106 (3.39.17).
[25] Caffin, v.
[26] Alan M. Stibbs, *The First Epistle General of Peter* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 17; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 17. Stibbs does not state what this evidence is.
[27] Harrison, 372.
[28] Eusebius, 68 (3.3.1).
[29] Vaughan and Lea, 6.

we derive the term "idiot." Based on this statement, some scholars seem persuaded that a man of Peter's background could not have written 1 Peter because it is written with a very sophisticated and elegant form of Greek. This epistle ranks among the best in the New Testament in terms of its quality of Greek, featuring "polished Attic style, Classical vocabulary … and rhetorical quality."[30] The Greek used in 2 Peter, for instance, is far inferior to that of 1 Peter. Tradition also exists which identifies Mark as "the interpreter of Peter,"[31] leading some to conclude that Mark wrote the Gospel which bears his name because Peter was unable to write it.

The most common response to this argument focuses on 1 Peter 5:12 and the statement, "Through Silvanus … I have written to you." It is argued that Silvanus served as Peter's amanuensis (or scribal secretary) who wrote as Peter dictated the letter. Paul, who was highly educated (Acts 26:24), made use of an amanuensis in several letters (see Romans 16:22, for example). In most cases where an amanuensis was used, "the principal would give the gist of what he wished to say, revise it after the secretary had drawn up the document, perhaps add a few words of his own, and finally seal it. It was his, originating from and guaranteed by him."[32] If this is what Peter means in his reference to Silvanus, then the proficiency of Greek may be attributable to Silas rather than to Peter. Selwyn notes that there are similarities of thought and wording between 1 Peter, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and the proclamation of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 which may indicate that Silas was the scribe of all of them.[33]

The wording of 5:12, however, does not demand that Silas was an amanuensis. Though some have suggested that it is "almost certain that this verse accords him a literary function,"[34] others are unconvinced. Kummel claims that "no one has yet proved that *grapho dia tinos* can mean 'to authorize someone else to compose a piece of writing.'"[35] The most natural reading of Peter's original words would indicate that Silas was to be the courier of the letter rather than the scribe. There are cases in extant Greek writings where this was clearly the intended meaning (for example, Acts 15:23). The commendation of Silas as "our faithful brother (for so I regard him)" in 5:12 seems to be a personal commendation of him as the bearer of the letter. He or another scribe who was very proficient in Greek may have been employed in the writing of this letter, but nothing in the text requires us to believe this.

There seems to be no real problem in asserting that Peter himself could have written the letter, even given the mastery of Greek. This was the language of commerce and had been in use in Palestine for 400 years before Peter was born. Even prior to this, in Isaiah's day (the eighth century BC), Peter's home region was referred to as "Galilee of the Gentiles" (Isaiah 9:1), so it seems that one who was raised there would be well-acquainted with Greek even if he was Jewish by birth. After all, Peter's own brother Andrew and his fellow-citizen Philip have Greek names. As a commercial fisherman in Galilee, Peter would have very likely used Greek on a regular basis as he interacted with customers and neighbors. Over time as he interacted with Gentile believers in his ministry, his proficiency in Greek would have only increased. Matthew and

[30] John H. Elliott, *1 Peter* (Anchor Bible 37B; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 120. Cited in Jobes, 7.
[31] Eusebius, 105 (3.39.15), et al.
[32] Stibbs, 26.
[33] Stibbs, 27-28.
[34] Stibbs, 26.
[35] W. G. Kummel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, revised edition, (trans H. C. Kee; Nashville: Abingdon, 1975), 424. Cited in Grudem, 24.

James both wrote in excellent Greek, and both hailed, like Peter, from Galilee. While we do not know the identity of the author of Hebrews, it is almost certainly the product of a Jewish writer, and yet it contains some of the finest Greek in all the New Testament.

Greek seems even to have been very common even among Jews in Jerusalem. At least 64 Jewish ossuaries (or bone boxes) have been found in Jerusalem with inscriptions only in Greek (compared to only 97 in Hebrew or Aramaic). Greek inscriptions have also been found in a number of synagogues. Josephus was a Jewish born historian who is quite proficient with the Greek language, and he indicates in his writings that it was not uncommon for a Jew who was so inclined to learn Greek and make use of it as he had done, though his preference was for his "own tongue."[36]

Not only is it possible that Peter could have written in a very polished style of Greek, it is also possible that the style is not as well-polished as some critics desire to convey. Grudem refers to the studies of Nigel Turner which concluded that there are "several areas of stylistic weakness and departure from high literary standards in 1 Peter. The Greek may be said to be excellent, but to say it is a literary masterpiece is probably an overstatement."[37]

Karen Jobes has recently published landmark research which asserts that 1 Peter demonstrates a style characteristic of a Semitic author for whom Greek is a second language. Using a technical and quantitative measurement of syntactical analysis, she is able to conclude that 1 Peter's author is not nearly as proficient with Greek as the classical writer Polybius nor Josephus, the Jewish historian who had acquired Greek as a second language.[38] Of course Jobes' conclusion cannot point us directly to Peter as the author, for there were a multitude of Palestinian Jews who spoke Greek as a second language in the early church. Three of them are named in this letter (Peter, Mark, Silvanus). Still, Jobes' research does much to silence the critics of Petrine authorship who emphasize the letter's Greek quality.

As to the traditional description of Mark as Peter's interpreter, the term used by Eusebius and Irenaeus, *hermeneutes*, does not always mean one who translates from one language to another. It "can also mean 'expounder' or 'one who explains a teaching.'"[39] This is the meaning of the verbal form of the word in Luke 24:27, and also how it is used in the writings of Josephus and Clement of Alexandria, among others. Therefore, Mark's role is best understood as one who "was explaining or expounding Peter's gospel message."[40]

The anti-Petrine argument of Greek usage seems to rest entirely upon the charge of the Jewish officials in Acts 4:13 that Peter and John were illiterate idiots (my own translation). It is interesting that few if any scholars raise this same objection to John's authorship of his gospel, epistles or the Revelation. More importantly, *agrammatos* can mean illiterate, but often refers to one not formally educated. It seems that in the context of Acts 4, the amazement of the Jewish

[36] Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20.11.2. Accessed 5 Feb 2010. Online: http://www.ccel.org/ccel/josephus/works/files/ant-20.htm.
[37] Grudem, 26.
[38] Jobes, 7. See Jobes' excursus in which the details of this research are more thoroughly presented.
[39] Grudem, 27.
[40] Grudem, 27.

officials was that these men, who had not received formal rabbinic theological training, could stand their ground in a religious dialogue with the theological elite of Israel. They were reminiscent of Jesus, who was also not trained formally in rabbinic schools, leading the officials to conclude that Peter and John had been with Him (Acts 4:13). After all, they were not discussing a written treatise but were engaged in a verbal exchange, and they knew neither Peter nor John well enough to know if either of them could read or write. They were making a pejorative criticism based on their own intellectual and religious snobbery in contrast to the humble backgrounds of these Galilean fishermen.

The critics of Petrine authorship on these grounds are being very selective with biblical data. They are willing to believe that the Bible records the truth about what the Jewish officials said, and beyond that, that the officials spoke rightly about the intellectual condition of Peter and John. Yet, they are unwilling to believe that the Bible accurately states who the author of this epistle is in its opening verse. In other words, those biased and critical religious leaders are given more credibility than whoever wrote this letter. As we have seen, this argument concerning the Greek style of 1 Peter is not nearly as convincing as its proponents would like to believe.

2. The Use of the Septuagint (LXX)

Around 200 BC, the Hebrew Bible (our Old Testament) was translated into Greek for wider use and circulation since Greek had become the dominant language of the world by that time. This translation is known as the Septuagint, a Latin word meaning "seventy," the number of translators involved in the process. For this reason it is commonly abbreviated LXX, the Roman numeral for 70. It is claimed that Peter's native tongue would have likely been Aramaic (with perhaps a familiarity with and fondness for Hebrew), not Greek, therefore, the LXX would not have been his preferred version of Scripture to use. This argument fails to recognize that the LXX had become the most commonly used version of the Bible by New Testament times, and it would only be natural for Peter to use it. This was the Bible of the earliest generation of Christians. The rest of the New Testament writings seem to rely heavily on the LXX in their Old Testament citations. Also, this would undoubtedly be the most familiar (if not the only available) version to his audience.

3. Strong Similarities with Paul

This argument emphasizes the well-known confrontation that occurred between Peter and Paul described in Galatians 2:11-14. It is assumed on this basis that the two had different theologies and that their writings would bear more differences than similarities. Yet this is not necessarily the case when 1 Peter is compared to the Pauline Epistles. It can surely be admitted that Peter and Paul express similar ideas, but analysis of the wording does not indicate that there was literary dependence in either direction. We know from 2 Peter 3:15-16 that Peter had read some of Paul's writings and traditional accounts place them both in Rome around the same time period.[41] Though neither is singled out by the other in their epistles as companions, they may well have associated together there during these years as they unquestionably had before.

[41] Eusebius, 63 (2.25).

We should not be amazed that the two men share common emphases. Their differences at Antioch discussed by Paul in Galatians 2 were not theological. They had to do with a matter of personal behavior in which Paul confronted Peter about a momentary lapse into hypocrisy. The two shared a common theology as apostolic leaders of the infant church. They were participants and shapers of a common tradition, so there must certainly be similarities in their writings. As Martin Luther said, "In the first place we must remember that all the apostles advocated one and the same doctrine."[42] After all, there would be more cause for concern if their writings did not bear similarities or contradicted each other at crucial points of doctrine. It is worth pointing out here that there are also strong similarities between 1 Peter and James, yet it seems that few are willing to make a similar anti-Petrine argument on that basis. If the letter was not written by Peter, but was written with a strong dependence upon Paul's letters, it seems unreasonable to conclude that the forger would choose to attach Peter's name when he could have just as easily ascribed it to Paul.

Selwyn's observation on the parallels between the New Testament writers is worth quoting at length:

> The vocabulary of the N.T. is not a very wide one; and the number of words which are available for the expression of a particular idea is not unlimited. Verbal parallels, therefore, often have no other reason than the fact that the word in question was the obvious and natural word to use in the circumstances. Nor are the ideas themselves infinitely numerous; for they form part of, or derive from, a definite Gospel … which was the *raison d'etre* of the Christian Church and its faith.[43]

4. Absence of Information from the Life of Jesus

Given Peter's place of prominence among the early disciples, it is assumed by some than an authentic writing from his hand would be filled with direct quotations and first-hand accounts of Jesus' words and deeds. The seeming absence of these features indicates to them that Peter could not have been responsible for this letter. Yet it is far from obvious that the letter is lacking in this regard. There are certainly some verses that bear striking similarity to the sayings of Jesus found in the Gospels, but not as many as one may expect if this letter was written by Jesus' closest companion for three years. Interestingly, as MacArthur notes, "it is precisely the *presence* of such reminiscences in 2 Peter that causes critics to reject its authenticity (cf. 2 Peter 1:16-18; 3:2). They cannot have it both ways."[44]

Three responses may be given here. First, it must be kept in mind that Peter did not set out to write a biographical account or "gospel." This is a letter to a specific audience in a specific set of circumstances. To assume that Peter would have surely made more direct quotations or references to the words and actions of Jesus would be similar to assuming that a war veteran would make reference to his military experiences in every future conversation and

[42] Luther, 9.
[43] Selwyn, 8. Cited in John MacArthur, *1 Peter* (The MacArthur New Testament Commentary; Chicago: Moody, 2004), 6-7.
[44] MacArthur, 7.

correspondence. Certainly Peter's familiarity with Jesus influenced him to be the man he had become, and that in turn influences his words. So his words can reflect his experiences with Jesus without being direct quotations of His teachings or historical narratives of His life. If tradition is accurate, Peter would have a hand in the writing of a gospel, The Gospel of Mark. His intention in this letter is not to declare everything he knows about Jesus, but "to address the concrete circumstances of his readers."[45] A similar difference in content can be observed when the John's Gospel is compared to his first epistle.

Second, as Schreiner states, "The objection is a psychological argument, for it posits what someone who knew the historical Jesus would do if he indeed wrote 1 Peter."[46] This is a matter of sheer conjecture. None of us can say with certainty that we know what Peter (or anyone else for that matter) would have done in a certain scenario. A scholar who asserts this essentially claims that he or she has "middle knowledge", a knowledge of counterfactuals that few theologians seem willing to ascribe even unto God.[47] We who possess finite minds must deal with the realities stated in the text. If Peter is the author (as the text declares), then this is what Peter has done, regardless of what we think he could have, should have, or would have done.

Finally, it must never be conceded that 1 Peter is completely lacking in quotations, allusions, and scenes from the life of Jesus. There may be thirty or more of these parallels which Stibbs asserts are "woven into the framework of the discourse; they are not formal quotations."[48] Selwyn states that they "lie below the surface of the Epistle, and usually not far below it."[49] Robert Gundry's landmark study on the *verba Christi* ("words of Christ") demonstrates that there are "a remarkable number of parallels in form and general content which, taken together, leave one persuaded that Peter was writing as one who was very familiar with the teachings of Jesus, both from personal remembrance and perhaps from early acquaintance with at least some of the gospel records."[50] Gundry examines fifteen of these in detail and concludes that the references are not direct quotations and therefore do not indicate a literary dependence on the gospels. He states that "the most striking feature … is that they refer to contexts in the gospels which are specially associated with the Apostle Peter or treat topics that would especially interest" him.[51] He says, "Examination of the gospel-passages where [these words of Jesus] appear shows that in most instances the Apostle Peter is a specially active participant in the narrative contexts."[52] Therefore, Gundry is able to conclude that the *verba Christi* serve a dual purpose of affirming Petrine authorship of the epistle and validating the sayings of Jesus in the gospel tradition.[53] These similarities between the sayings of Jesus in the Gospels and the wording of 1 Peter were noted by previous generations of scholars as well. B. C. Caffin wrote in the late nineteenth century, "These and other similar coincidences with the Lord's words as reported in the Gospels

[45] Schreiner, 31.
[46] Schreiner, 31.
[47] "Middle Knowledge" (*scientia media*) is the doctrine that God knows the actions and decisions that free creatures would make in any possible set of circumstances.
[48] Stibbs, 35.
[49] Selwyn, 23. Cited in Harrison, 374.
[50] Grudem, 44.
[51] Robert Gundry, "'Verba Christi' in I Peter: Their Implications Concerning the Authorship of I Peter and the Authenticity of the Gospel Tradition." *New Testament Studies* 13:345. Cited in Jobes, 17.
[52] Gundry, cited in Kistemaker, 12.
[53] Jobes, 17.

are so simple and unaffected, they seem to come so naturally to the writer's thoughts, that we are led at once to infer that that writer must be one who, like St. John, could declare to others that which he had heard, which he had seen with his eyes. Some of them point in an especial manner to Apostle St. Peter as the writer of the Epistle."[54]

5. The Nature of the Persecutions Described

It is plain to even a casual reader of 1 Peter that the recipients of this letter, along with Christians elsewhere, were experiencing some measure of persecution at the time of the writing. It is claimed that state-sponsored, Empire-wide persecution of Christians did not arise until much later than Peter's lifetime, during the reigns of Domitian (81-96 AD) or Trajan (98-117 AD). Tradition holds that Peter died much earlier, under Nero's persecution in Rome in the mid-60s AD. Yet, even during the reigns of those later emperors, there was no official policy for persecuting Christians across the Empire. Certainly from Nero onward, there was an increasing intensity of persecution for Christians in Rome, and state-sponsored persecution increased elsewhere as a result. While Christians certainly represented a sizeable target of persecution, it seems that they were part of a larger group who were persecuted because of refusal to worship the Emperors. Even under Trajan's reign there did not seem to be an official government policy of church persecution. During this time, Pliny the Younger's letters from Asia Minor (the destination of 1 Peter) were written in which he inquires in ignorance about what to do about the Christians in that region.[55] Persecution is described, but the absence of an official government policy had left Pliny unsure of how the case of Christianity in the region should be handled.

If the conditions of 1 Peter describe the widespread state-sponsored acts of terror against the church that some critics claim, then it seems they do not fit the historical context of any emperor perhaps until Diocletian in the first decade of the fourth century. In fact, the circumstances described in 1 Peter do not seem to describe such conditions at all. There is no suggestion that the Empire is maneuvering to destroy the church in the letter. There are no hints of impending martyrdom, and governing authorities are not spoken of as enemies of the church, but rather as authorities deserving honor, respect, and submission (2:13-17). Rather, it seems that what the recipients of this letter were experiencing were the sufferings that Christians had experienced since the birth of the church (see the entirety of Acts for example) at the hands of local leaders and unbelieving civilians. "The specific persecution referred to throughout the books seems limited to verbal slander, malicious talk, and false accusations" which amounted to "sporadic, personal, and unorganized social ostracism of Christians with varying intensity, probably reinforced at the local level by the increasing suspicions of Roman officials at all levels."[56] One of Peter's aims in this letter is to assure the readers that their experiences are common to all Christians at the time, even as Jesus Himself suffered and promised His followers that they would as well. Across the Empire, the exclusive claims of the gospel, the relative novelty of Christianity in pioneer mission areas, and the evangelistic zeal of Christians were met with opposition of varying degrees, even as we see today (though perhaps to a lesser albeit increasing degree in the West).

[54] Caffin, iii.
[55] Schreiner, 29.
[56] Jobes, 9.

Therefore, as Jobes concludes, "because the situation in the letter cannot be associated with any of the three known officially sponsored persecutions but reflects a situation that pertained throughout the first two hundred years of Christianity, the persecutions are of no help in dating the letter."[57] It seems that if the later official persecutions were going on when this letter was written, more severe intensity would be reflected. The lack of such indicates than an early date within Peter's lifetime is indeed a possibility, if not a probability.

6. The Supposed Acceptance of Pseudonymous Writings

A number of scholars have latched on to the idea that in the ancient world, anonymous writings could be attributed to well-known authors without concern or objection. Some suggest that doing so was a means of honoring one's teachers or influences. On this basis it is claimed that 1 Peter was written by a person or group who was part of a "Petrine School," closely tied to and identifying with the apostle. There is no extant evidence to establish that such a "school" ever existed. In fact, if the letter has such strong similarities with Paul (as critics of Petrine authorship claim), then it seems that 1 Peter would be more likely the product of a Pauline school than a Petrine one.

Others appeal to the notion of the "therapeutic lie," in which a person may make a false claim for "noble reasons." What seems to be overlooked in this approach is the patent hypocrisy of such an act by early Christians. Truth-telling was a precious value to Christians (and should still be today!). This epistle admonishes its readers to a high standard of morality, even when there is great cost. Certainly passing off a lie for some "noble" purpose would be hypocritical and worthy of condemnation if it were ever discovered to be the case.

Still others resort to the pseudonym theory claiming that 1 Peter stands as an example of "transparent fiction," in which the readers would have been well aware that Peter had long been dead, but that the letter represented something he may have said if he were still alive. As Jobes notes, "Pseudonymity appears to have been an acceptable literary device when the alleged author had been dead for centuries."[58] One may imagine a contemporary example of this being something like "Abraham Lincoln's words to twenty-first century Americans," or "Charles Spurgeon's letter to the contemporary church," in which the ideas of those men were couched in a contemporary setting for a new audience. No one would be persuaded that the men actually wrote those things, but they would be written "in the spirit of" their long-dead influences. However, it should be noted that in the early church, there is not one piece of evidence to indicate anyone ever doubted Peter's authorship of 1 Peter. Therefore, if it was an attempt at transparent fiction, it was a disastrous failure.

Severely lacking in all suggestions of pseudonymity is a proper motive. Typically, writings were pseudonymously ascribed in order to add apostolic credibility to unorthodox contents. If an early writer wanted to sneak some novelty or heresy into the church, he would claim that it came from the pen of one with unquestioned authority. In the case of 1 Peter, however, there is no heresy to be found. One who would write such a letter as this may as well ascribe his own name to it, as the early church fathers did, without fear of it being rejected on any grounds. "But if we ask why

[57] Jobes, 10.
[58] Jobes, 16.

the author should have written in the name of Peter rather than in his own name, nobody seems to have come up with a convincing answer."[59]

The bottom line on the theory of pseudonymous authorship is that no evidence can be shown to demonstrate that the early church ever accepted writings which were known to have false attribution. The apostle Paul warned the church at Thessalonica about a forgery that was circulating in his name (2 Thessalonians 2:2). Certain features of Paul's letters are understood to be marks of internal authentication (2 Thessalonians 3:17). The early church knew that falsely-attributed writings were circulating, and when those writings were discovered to be forgeries they were rejected by the church regardless of the orthodoxy of their contents. "Both Eusebius and Tertullian report that the books were rejected because of their content *and the false claim of authorship*."[60] Donelson remarks, "No one seems to have accepted a document as religiously and philosophically prescriptive which was known to be forged. I do not know of a single example."[61] Examples of this would include the letter to the Laodiceans and 3 Corinthians, both claiming to have been written by Paul. These were both accepted briefly in some locales, but once their true spurious authorship became known, they were rejected. Even though 3 Corinthians contained no aberrant theology and was written in an effort to honor Paul, the Asian bishop who actually wrote it was censured and barred from serving in the church.[62] Though other writings which were pseudonymously attributed to Peter circulated in the early church, these were immediately and widely rejected but 1 Peter never was. Interestingly even the writer of the Gospel of Mark, which is closely tied to Peter in the patristic writings, did not attempt to pass off the work as a writing of the Apostle even though this would have strengthened its credibility in some quarters.

It would be hard to imagine the death of Peter going unnoticed or unpublicized among first century Christians across the Empire, and it seems that an attempt to pass off a letter as coming from his hand after his death would not have been successful. While pseudonymous writings may have been considered acceptable forms of literature in other arenas (and it is beyond the scope of our consideration to entertain that suggestion), it is clear from all available evidence of the early church that Christians never considered such practice to be legitimate.

In surveying the evidences and arguments, it can be concluded that there are no compelling reasons to deny that Peter wrote the epistle. The data of the text asserts that he did, and the burden of proof rests upon the shoulders of those who would seek to disprove the claim. Unless better reasons are offered for rejecting Peter as the author, we can remain confident that the ascription in 1:1 is authentic. As Stibbs humorously states, "however severe the cross-examination, I Peter always has an alibi. It was always somewhere else at the time."[63] Just as the tide of academic opinion shifted in the late nineteenth century concerning the authorship of this letter, it seems that in our own day, the shift is occurring again, with more and more scholars willing to recognize that Peter is, in fact, the author 1 Peter.

---

[59] D. A. Carson, Douglas Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 426.
[60] Schreiner, 27. Emphasis original.
[61] L. R. Donelson, *Pseudepigraphy and Ethical Argument in the Pastoral Epistles* (Tubingen: Morh, 1986), 11. Cited in Schreiner, 27.
[62] Jobes, 15.
[63] Stibbs, 21.

II. Date

The conclusion one reaches concerning the dating of this epistle is directly tied to one's conclusion about authorship. If, for instance, one denies Peter's authorship, then a wide window of dating options is opened. Most who reject Petrine authorship date the letter to the reign of Trajan (98-117 AD), comparing the persecution described in the letter with the conditions described in the correspondence between Trajan and Pliny the Younger. Pliny's letter indicates that harsh treatment of Christians had been a reality in Asia Minor for a decade or more prior to Trajan's reign, therefore some will date the 1 Peter to the time of Domitian (81-96 AD). Fewer suggest the reigns of Vespasian or Titus as possibilities (69-81 AD). As we have already seen, the persecution described in 1 Peter does not appear to be the result of an imperial decree, and therefore does not need to be assigned to these late dates. We know that the persecution of Christians during the reign of Nero began in 64-65 AD after Nero made Christians the scapegoat for the great fire of Rome. We have no evidence to suggest that these persecutions spread throughout the Empire at that time, however. Therefore, it is entirely plausible to date the letter to within the lifetime of the Apostle Peter. If he died under the persecution of Nero in the middle 60s, then there is no need to date the letter later than that.[64] If the Neronian persecution had been fully launched, we might expect more explicit reference to the situation in Rome (if that is the location from which Peter wrote). It is also hard to imagine Peter encouraging his readers to adopt such a positive view about the government (2:13-17) without some further explanation if the Neronian persecution was underway. Therefore, 63 or early 64 AD seems to be the upper limit on the date range for this letter. Since suffering for the cause of Christ was a reality for many in the Roman Empire since the earliest days of the church (ca. 30 AD), it may have been written even earlier than this.

Some have pointed out that Peter does not mention Paul's name in his writings, and Paul does not mention Peter among his companions in his prison epistles written from Rome. This leads to a popular conclusion that Peter must have written either after Paul's death or release from prison (if he endured two Roman imprisonments). The earliest conceivable date on this view would be 62. Though seldom discussed as a possibility, Peter could have written prior to Paul's Roman imprisonment.

If the theory set forth by Karen Jobes on the identity of the recipients (see below) is accurate (and there is much evidence to support it), then it is possible that Peter may have written this letter in the early 50s. After all, we do not need to wait for the reign of Nero to find Christian persecution; it can be found in the earliest days of the church's history (see Acts 4 and following). One potential argument against this would be that we have no evidence of Silas and Mark being with Peter as early as the 50s AD. This is an argument from silence on both sides, however, and we cannot eliminate the possibility that both were present with Peter in Rome (see Provenance below) that early. Silas disappears from the travel narratives in Acts after his visit to Corinth in Acts 18. We know that these men were likely together at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, and may have been together at Antioch (given Paul's interaction with Peter there described in Galatians). Therefore, we cannot rule out the possibility of a very early date for this epistle, the early to mid-50s.

[64] Nero committed suicide in 68.

III. Destination and Recipients

The areas designated in 1:1 indicate regions in northern Asia Minor (modern Turkey) between the Taurus Mountains and the Black Sea, an enormous area of approximately 129,000 square miles. Of the Roman provinces in Asia Minor, only Cilicia is not named. It is isolated from the rest by the Taurus Mountains.[65] It is possible that Peter does not intend to indicate official Roman provinces, but rather regions that bore these names informally in antiquity. For instance, Pontus and Bithynia were part of the same official province, but are listed separately (at the beginning and end of the list respectively). If the areas addressed are regions rather than provinces, then we are dealing with a much smaller territory, though still rather vast.[66] These largely rural areas were richly diverse, encompassing "coastal regions, mountain ranges, plateaux, lakes and river systems. The inhabitants were even more diverse. They had 'different origins, ethnic roots, languages, customs, religions, and political histories.'"[67] To this Jobes adds, "The picture that emerges of the regions to which Peter wrote is one of a vast geographical area with small cities few and far between, of a diversified population of indigenous peoples, Greek settlers, and Roman colonists. The residents practiced many religions, spoke several languages, and were never fully assimilated into the Greco-Roman culture."[68]

This was likely an encyclical letter that would be carried by a courier (cf. 5:12, Silas?) to each congregation in these areas. The order listed may indicate the courier's route taken. "A map of the Roman roads in Asia Minor shows that a letter carrier, making a circular tour and starting from the seaport town Amastris on the Black Sea, after his voyage from Rome, would carry his letter exactly through these provinces in the order in which they stand."[69]

Since at least the time of Origen, many commentators have assumed Peter's audience to be predominantly Jewish Christians. Peter addresses them with terms used in Old Testament times to refer to Israel (1:1; 2:9-10). There is also an abundance of information in the letter which indicates that the readers must have been familiar with the Old Testament. We know that by the first century there was a Jewish population of considerable size in Asia Minor. In the late third century BC, Antiochus III sent 2,000 Jews from Babylon to colonize Lydia and Phrygia.[70]

In recent years, opinion has shifted and the majority of scholars now assume that the audience was predominantly Gentile Christians. This can hardly be called a recent development, for here Luther differed from Calvin, saying, "Peter wrote this, his first epistle, to the converted heathen."[71] This is based on the descriptions of the recipients' former way of life in 1:14, 1:18, 2:10 and 4:3-4. The description of a life of ignorance and emptiness would seem hardly fitting for those who had formerly lived under God's covenant with Israel. The list of vices in 4:3-4 are

[65] Thiessen, 283.
[66] Clowney, 16.
[67] Clowney, 17. Citing Selwyn, et al.
[68] Jobes, 22.
[69] Alexander Ferrier Mitchell, *Hebrews and the General Epistles*, 232. Cited in H. E. Dana, *Jewish Christianity* (Kansas City: Central Seminary Press, 1955), 135.
[70] Stephen Mitchell, *Anatolia: Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor* (2 vols; Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 2.32. Cited in Jobes, 23.
[71] Luther, 10.

certainly more fitting for those who lived amidst pagan Gentiles. Their pagan neighbors would not be "surprised" (4:4) that Jews (even those who were not Christians) avoided such activities, but would presume that Gentiles would rush into these activities according to their cultural customs.

It may be an unnecessary leap, however, to rule out the possibility of a Jewish audience based on the verses cited above. It is entirely possible that many of the Jews of that time period had adopted pagan worldviews and lifestyles. Even if they had not, Jewish religion as practiced in the first century had already been condemned by Jesus as spiritually worthless (see for example, Mark 11-13). Therefore, Gentile paganism and Jewish rabbinic religion were both spiritually empty "in that they offered no redemption, and both people groups were equally guilty in God's sight. … Nevertheless, faith in Jesus, the *Jewish* Messiah, brought converts into the religious world of Judaism …. Therefore … Peter addresses them indiscriminately from within the traditions of biblical Israel."[72]

Jewish converts would immediately identify with the Old Testament references and allusions in 1 Peter, and Gentile converts to Christianity would have also been well-taught from the Old Testament in their churches. After all, this was the Bible of the early church until the New Testament was assembled in final form. Other letters that were addressed to predominantly Gentile congregations also assume familiarity with the Old Testament (1 Corinthians, for example). Though the terms in 1:1 and 2:9 would seem descriptive of Old Testament Israel, Peter is most likely "simply applying to the church in the New Covenant age the language which previously had been appropriate for God's covenant people, the Jews."[73] Just as Israel had been declared by God to be "not My people" (2:10, cf. Hosea 1:9-10), but then were brought back to the Lord to be His people (Hosea 2:23, cf. 1 Peter 2:10), so this reconciled body of people from all nations was formerly not a people, but now God has made them to be one body, and reconciled them to Himself as His people in Christ.

It seems safe to say that whatever the ethnic majority was among Peter's recipients, that these Christians included both Jews and Gentiles. The area was known to be very diverse in its population and culture. Over the next few centuries, this region would become the cradle of Christianity in the world. "We may surmise that, in no small part because of this letter and the faithfulness of those who received it, well-established churches flourished in all five of these regions (1:1) by AD 180."[74]

There is nothing within the letter that would specifically indicate that Peter had a prior personal relationship with the recipients. He mentions no one by name and makes no reference to their shared experiences with them. There is no indication in Scripture or tradition that he ever traveled in Asia Minor, though we cannot exclude the possibility. Eusebius states that "Peter appears to have preached through Pontus, Galatia, Bithynia, Cappadocia, and Asia"[75] before coming to Rome. Most, however, agree that Eusebius was inferring this from 1 Peter 1:1 rather than from other evidence. Some have postulated that the reason Paul was prevented by the Holy

[72] Jobes, 24.
[73] Grudem, 39.
[74] Jobes, 22-23. Parenthetical citation mine.
[75] Eusebius, 67 (3.1.2).

Spirit from entering this area (Acts 16:6-10) was because Peter was already at work here, but this is sheer speculation. It also remains a possibility that Silas (and/or Mark?) had travelled through this region before joining Peter, and may have reported conditions to him. This would be conjectural for there is no evidence of this in any records or traditions, neither is it entertained in any of the reputable literature on 1 Peter.

A recent theory set forth by Karen Jobes suggests that "the Christians to whom Peter writes were converted elsewhere, probably Rome, and then displaced to Asia Minor."[76] Recognizing that most commentators understand the Diaspora language of 1:1 as metaphorical, Jobes suggests that this "need not exclude some literal sense related to the letter's original historical circumstances."[77] Her theory provides some satisfying answers to several thorny questions about Peter's audience.

One of the most perplexing issues concerning the audience of this letter is the question of how they were evangelized initially. It is often argued that the letter could not have been issued within Peter's lifetime, for there was not enough to time for the gospel to travel gradually into these regions from the urban centers in southern Asia Minor evangelized by Paul (though Acts 19:10 does indicate that the gospel spread widely through the province of Asia). Neither is there any extant evidence that any apostle traveled through these rural, northern regions. One theory is that the area was evangelized by the returning pilgrims who had been converted in Jerusalem at Pentecost. While the text does indicate that there were people from these regions present (Acts 2:9-11), thus establishing a possible link between the readers and Peter, it seems that those who were present at the preaching event on Pentecost had probably moved permanently to Jerusalem or the surrounding area. Acts does not specifically say that these believed or ever returned to Asia Minor. Additionally, in the epistle, Peter's words in 1:12 are generally interpreted to mean that he was not the one who initially preached the gospel to them. Though the Pentecostal pilgrim theory has more to its favor than the theories of apostolic visitation or gradual evangelization from Pauline churches, it is not without its problems. A speculation is offered by Blum: "It is possible that Silas may have ministered in these northern provinces."[78] There is no available means of supporting that suggestion, nor does it appear to be a popular one.

This is where Jobes' theory comes in. According to her, it is possible that "the Christians to whom Peter writes had become Christians elsewhere, had some association with Peter prior to his writing to them, and now found themselves foreigners and resident aliens scattered throughout Asia Minor."[79] Jobes points to the Roman practice of "urbanization through colonization" in which the Empire would populate a recently conquered territory with displaced people. The Roman Emperor who "left the greatest legacy in Asia Minor through the establishment of cities and roads"[80] was Claudius (who reigned from 41-54 AD). He was the only emperor who established cities in each of the five regions named in 1:1.

[76] Jobes, xi.
[77] Jobes, 25.
[78] Edwin A. Blum, "1 Peter" (Expositor's Bible Commentary 9; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 212.
[79] Jobes, 26.
[80] S. Mitchell, 1.95-98, cited in Jobes, 29.

Jobes notes that it was "not uncommon for the emperor or senate to deport a group viewed to be troublemakers in Rome to colonize a newly acquired territory."[81] Often these were so deemed because of ethnicity, occupation, or religion. Some of these were considered as foreigners in Rome as well as in their new residence. At times they became the victims of violence and persecution by the indigenous people in the colonized territory.

The Roman historian Suetonius describes a massive expulsion of Jews from Rome that took place under Claudius around 49-50 AD. This event is mentioned in Acts 18:2 where Priscilla and Aquilla are said to have come to Corinth when Claudius "commanded all the Jews to leave Rome." Claudius had forbidden the Jews from gathering together in 41 AD, and Seutonius states that the reason for the later expulsion was the frequent disturbances which resulted from "the instigation of Chrestus."[82] Many have suggested that "Chrestus" is a corrupted spelling which refers to Jesus, and this is strengthened by early anti-Christian graffiti which has been found with the same spelling.

Claudius was a religiously conservative champion of the Roman pantheon, but he demonstrated some tolerance for other religions so long as they did not disturb the peace, offend accepted morality, or seek to convert native Romans. "Evangelistic Christians … could be accused of violating all three points."[83] In fact, the twentieth century historian and biographer of Claudius, Vincent Mary Scramuzza, has stated that the expulsion of "Jews" from Rome in the late 40s primarily targeted prominent Christians in the city.[84] Since there were upwards of 50,000 Jews living in Rome during Claudius's reign, it seems unlikely that Claudius would have been able to export the entire Jewish population. It is more likely that those who were deported were Christians (whether Jewish or Gentile) and perhaps some Jewish people who clashed with the Christians creating a disturbance of the *Pax Romana.*

German historian Helga Botermann actually identifies Peter's preaching in Rome during the early 40s as the catalyst for much of the hostility Jews faced there.[85] If this is correct, it would place Peter in Rome far earlier than most evangelical scholars have been willing to locate him there. Eusebius relates a tradition which speaks of Peter coming to Rome "immediately under the reign of Claudius, by the benign and gracious providence of God," in order to combat the heresies of Simon Magus who had allegedly found a wide audience for his false teachings following his confrontation with the apostles in Jerusalem in Acts 8.[86] If this tradition is true, Peter could have arrived in Rome by 41 AD.

Evangelicals have tended to ignore or disregard the traditional accounts of Peter having a 25 year ministry in Rome, primarily because this is a major component of the Catholic case for the apostolic succession of the papacy. This seems to be highly fallacious reasoning. Peter may have

---

[81] Jobes, 30.
[82] Cited in Jobes, 32.
[83] Jobes, 32.
[84] Vincent Mary Scramuzza, *The Emperor Claudius* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1940), 151. Cited in Jobes, 33.
[85] Helga Botermann, *Das Judenedikt des Kaisers Claudius: Romischer Staat und "Christiani" im 1.Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1996), 127. Cited in Jobes, 33-34.
[86] Eusebius, 47-50 (2.13-15). Eusebius points to Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement and Papias as validation for some of this tradition, but does not cite them for every detail.

had a "ministry" in Rome that spanned over 25 years, between the early 40s and middle 60s, even if he did not maintain continuous residence there over that time (we know for instance that he was in Jerusalem for the Council in Acts 15, ca. late 40s). Since it was relatively easy to travel to and from Rome, especially by sea, this view would posit an initial visit to Rome in the early 40s, a brief trip to Jerusalem and back in the mid-40s, before being expelled from Rome around or shortly after 49. This view would allow for Peter returning to Rome during the early 60s (without prohibiting the possibility of earlier visits back to Rome), remaining there until his death.

In Acts 18:2, we learn that Priscilla and Aquila were among those evicted from Rome under Claudius, and that they had come to dwell in Corinth. From 1 Corinthians 9:5 we discover that Peter (and his wife) had perhaps visited Corinth at some point, and there was a "Peter faction" in the church at Corinth (1:12, where Peter is called "Cephas"). This does not prove, but does add credence and plausibility to, the theory that Peter may have been with some of these Corinthian Christians while they still resided in Rome.

There is one indication in Scripture that opens the remote possibility that Peter may have traveled to Rome in the early 40s. In Acts 12, when Peter was miraculously rescued from prison, he met briefly and secretly with the other believers in Jerusalem before he "left and went to another place" (12:17). This could be a veiled reference to Rome. If Acts is dated to around 62 AD, use of "another place" may have been prudent for two reasons. It would prevent compromising the defense of Paul before Roman authorities, and it would keep the movements and whereabouts of Peter concealed. He would have still been considered a fugitive following his angelic jailbreak. This would also explain why Peter used the name "Babylon" to conceal his location from any Roman authorities who may have intercepted 1 Peter as it was being delivered. Concern for one another's safety may also be a contributing factor to the silence of Peter and Paul concerning the other in their letters. While it is a far stretch to connect "another place" with Rome specifically, it is a plausible reason why, of all the places in the Mediterranean region to which Peter could have easily traveled, Rome is the only location outside of Palestine that claims to have any historical association with Peter.[87]

If this reconstruction is accurate, then it seems that when Peter addresses his readers as "resident aliens" in 1 Peter 1:1, he may be using "the sociohistorical situation of his readers to explain their sociospiritual sitation."[88] Just as they found themselves as displaced peoples geographically and politically, so they were, because of their faith in Christ and citizenship in His Kingdom, also spiritual pilgrims who had not yet arrived in their true homeland. They may have been outcasts in Asia Minor, outcasts in the Empire, but they are "chosen" in Christ (1:1-2).

IV. Provenance

Where was Peter when he wrote this epistle? According to 5:13, he was in "Babylon." Though on the surface this seems like an easy question to answer, there are a number of factors to consider. The natural assumption would be to locate Peter at the ancient Mesopotamian city of Babylon, capital of the Babylonian Empire. John Calvin is among those who believe that this is

[87] Jobes, 34-35.
[88] Jobes, 38.

Peter's location when he writes this letter.[89] By the first century, however, this city was relatively desolate and obscure. Strabo, who died in 19 AD, wrote that "the greater part of Babylon is so deserted that one would not hesitate to say … The Great City is a great desert."[90] Even before this, in the last 50 years before Christ, Diodorus of Sicily remarked that the palaces and buildings of Babylon had been effaced or left in ruins, and that only a small part of the city was inhabited. The rest, he said, "is given over to agriculture."[91] It had apparently been in this condition for several centuries by Peter's time.[92] We have no evidence in Scripture or Christian tradition that Peter ever visited Mesopotamian Babylon, nor is there evidence of a Christian church there until well beyond the apostolic period. "The Eastern Church made no attempt to claim the apostle for itself until quite late, and then only on the basis of this passage."[93] A simple survey of the argumentation used to support a Mesopotamian provenance demonstrates how difficult this position is to defend. Tenney is polite to say, "their reasons are not very cogent."[94]

Another area which was known as Babylon during the first century was a small military outpost in Egypt near modern-day Cairo mentioned in the writings of Strabo. Apparently, it originated as an Assyrian refugee settlement.[95] There is no extant evidence or tradition that would connect Peter with this location at any point in time. No credible attempt has ever been made to establish an Egyptian provenance of 1 Peter.

Eusebius, Papias, Clement of Rome, Jerome, and Martin Luther are among the many who have understood the term "Babylon" to indicate Rome. This view "was generally accepted up to the time of the Reformation."[96] Eusebius mentions Peter's reference to Rome "by an unusual figure of speech, Babylon."[97] We know that at some point "Babylon" became a cryptic reference for Rome, for it is used this way in Revelation 16-18. Just as Babylon was the dominant world power, the locus of opposition for Israel, and a seedbed of paganism and idolatry in the later Old Testament period, Rome had become that in the New Testament era. "Just as the Babylonian exile marginalized the religion of the Jews with respect to the dominant society, Roman society of Peter's day was marginalizing the Christian faith."[98] There is strong traditional evidence that places Peter in Rome near the end of his life (and perhaps also at various times prior to that).

Some would suggest that "Babylon" did not become code for Rome until after Peter's lifetime. Thiessen notes that "there is no evidence that this term was ever applied to Rome until after the writing of the Apocalypse" (Revelation).[99] Paine asserts, however, "The symbolic use of Old Testament names for existing cities was well known in apostolic times."[100] Jobes suggests that the function of "Babylon" here is not the same as in the later apocalyptic literature (Revelation,

---

[89] Waltner and Charles, 19.
[90] Cited in Grudem, 34.
[91] Cited in Grudem, 34.
[92] Dana, 133.
[93] Stibbs, 65.
[94] Merrill C. Tenney, *The New Testament: An Historical and Analytic Survey* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 363.
[95] Stephen W. Paine, "1 Peter," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1968), 1442.
[96] Caffin, ix.
[97] Eusebius, 50 (2.15)
[98] Jobes, 14.
[99] Thiessen, 285.
[100] Paine, 1442. He refers to Galatians 4:25, in which Sinai is likened to Jerusalem.

for example). She sees this as a literary device "motivated by the Diaspora framing of the letter (1:1) and functions as the closing inclusio of that motif."[101] Thus, because the parallel is literary rather than apocalyptic or prophetic, it would have been suitable to refer to Rome as "Babylon" anytime after Rome took power in Palestine in 63 BC. Another possible reason for using the cryptic name would be to conceal Peter's location and not put other Christians in the area at risk in the even that the letter was intercepted.

V. Purpose

We are greatly helped in discovering the letter's purpose by the fact that Peter states it succinctly in 5:12-13: "I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!" In the face of mounting anti-Christian hostilities, Peter gives encouragement and instruction to them, reminding them of the gospel and the faith they have in Christ and exhorting them to persevere in spite of hardships.

Grudem summarizes the purpose of the letter as being "to encourage the readers to grow in their trust in God and their obedience to Him throughout their lives, but especially when they suffer."[102] He suggests that 1 Peter 4:19 provides the best summary of the letter: "Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right."[103] Jobes notes, "First Peter encourages a transformed understanding of Christian self-identity that redefines how one is to live as a Christian in a world that is hostile to the basic principles of the gospel."[104] As such, the relevance of this letter is readily apparent to its original audience, to a suffering church throughout most of Christian history, and to the present church which increasingly finds itself as a "colony in a strange land, an island of one culture in the midst of another."[105] If contemporary Christian readers find that they do not live by a different set of values and priorities than their unbelieving neighbors, perhaps this letter is a wake-up call. "First Peter challenges Christians to reexamine our acceptance of society's norms and to be willing to suffer the alienation of being a visiting foreigner in our own culture wherever its values conflict with those of Christ."[106]

[101] Jobes, 14.
[102] Grudem, 40.
[103] Grudem, 40.
[104] Jobes, 3.
[105] Jobes, 5.
[106] Jobes, 5.