

LETTERS FROM PETER

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BIBLE STUDY TEXTBOOK

LETTERS FROM PETER

A NEW

- COMMENTARY
- WORKBOOK
- TEACHING MANUAL

Bruce Oberst

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To My Father
HENRY W. OBERST
whose companionship I have
enjoyed, whose life for over forty
years has been that of a consistent Christian
and whose outstanding virtue
is generosity,
This Book is Lovingly
Dedicated.

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PREFACE

The objective of *The Bible Study Textbook Series* is to improve the average Christian's knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures. I have tried to keep this objective in mind in the process of compiling this material. References are frequently made to Greek words (normally in their lexicon form), but these words are all anglicized and no knowledge of that language is necessary to understand these notes.

The *Expanded Translation* is as original as I could make it with my present knowledge and resources. It is best to consider this part of the work as an expression of the whole scope and meaning of the passage translated. For this reason, the Greek student will frequently notice words (and even phrases) not actually present in the original text. In those instances, the context and setting seemed to justify the insertion of such words or phrases. By this method of translation, it is hoped that misunderstandings and false ideas concerning the meaning of a passage will be kept to a minimum. But I have tried to be discreet and conservative in using words not found in the original, so that it may still be referred to as a translation and not a commentary. As a rule, words that fall within a parentheses indicate that the meaning of the previous word is being amplified; but this is not always true, and the reader may consider the decision of the translator to insert or omit these marks as purely arbitrary.

A Biographical list will be found in the closing pages. Authors and their works not mentioned in the footnotes are found there.

So many persons have assisted me in the compilation and arrangement of this volume that two or three pages would be necessary to record their names. However, a few acknowledgments are in order. To sister Eileen Crist, who has typed this entire work at least twice in the process of eliminating obscurities and errors, goes my heartfelt thanks. She has not only assisted me in this project, but in numerous others, and has never received a cent for her labors. Like Phoebe, "she hath been a helper of many, and of mine own self" (Rom. 16:2).

The encouragement of my wife has been a constant source of inspiration. She has gone out of her way to see to it that I had sufficient time to study and write. J. Charles Dailey has also provided much encouragement, with his appreciative remarks concerning the value of the book's contents. In addition, he gave many valuable suggestions concerning sentence structure and wording.

The original Scriptures were written by God through men

“moved by the Holy Spirit” (II Pet. 1:21). All other books were written by fallible man. This book is no exception. The author would sincerely appreciate letters pointing out ways in which the material might be improved, or his understanding of any passage made more accurate. Meanwhile, if these pages shall help some soul “grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ” (II Pet. 3:18), I shall feel genuinely rewarded.

—BRUCE OBERST

Suggested memory verses:

1:3-5; 13-20.

2:1-2; 10-11; 17.

3:16 (women); 7-9 (men); 15-16; 21.

4:15-16.

5:5-9.

INTRODUCTION

Commentaries on the Scriptures fall into two classes in my mind. Either they are of the "popular" variety that are superficial and often inaccurate, or they are so excessively technical that none but a reader trained in the Greek language can feel at home in them. Bruce Oberst has achieved a delicate balance between the extremes in this present volume.

As you read the expanded translation, you cannot help but feel familiar with the Holy Spirit's message through Peter. Then as you read the comments, there is enough of the technical language information to be useful for the trained reader, and yet not in a quantity discouraging to that one untrained in New Testament Greek.

Finally, there is the application of the text to contemporary life. Of what value is the Faith if it remains merely an academic profession? Our fellowship with Christ must change our conduct! Brother Oberst has splendidly applied the text to moral and ethical values and practices.

It has been my privilege to be associated with Bruce Oberst for the past seven years in the training of men to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. The message of the Cross has deeply molded his own life and saturated his very being. The fruit of the Spirit are quickly discoverable in his everyday life. It is from this consistent Christian living that he brings forth this usable volume on the letters of Peter.

—CHARLES DAILEY, 1962

I PETER

A SHORT SKETCH OF THE HUMAN AUTHOR

1. Peter was a fisherman (Matt. 4:18). He continued in this trade for a while after he was led to Christ.

2. He was led to know Christ by his brother, Andrew (Jn. 1:40-42).

3. His home-town was Bethsaida (Jn. 1:44). The location of this city is somewhat in doubt, but it was not far from Capernaum. (Compare Matt. 8:5 with verse 14 and Mk. 1:21 with verse 29.) Bethsaida means "house of fishing" or "fishery."* Most geographers locate the city on the north end of the Sea of Galilee and just to the east of the Jordan.

4. Peter was married and evidently had a family. Matt. 8:14 speaks of his wife's mother or mother-in-law being ill. The Romanists will have to admit it is rather difficult to have a mother-in-law without having a wife. Nor did he break his matrimonial ties when he was laboring so industriously as an Apostle, for he is specifically cited by Paul in I Cor. 9:5 as having a Christian wife. Furthermore, it is required of an Elder that he be married (I Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6) and Peter was an Elder at the time he wrote the first epistle (I Pet. 5:1). "Marriage is honorable among ALL . . ." (Heb. 13:4). It is the false teacher who is "forbidding to marry" (I Tim. 4:3).

5. His father, whose name is *literally* rendered *ionas* (Jonas) has had his name variously translated as Jonas, John, Jonah, and Jona. However, all are translations of the same Greek word.

6. Being brought up in his father's occupation, he and Andrew "were fishers" (Matt. 4:18). Luke 5:1-10 reveals that Peter (and evidently Andrew) became partners (*koinonos*) with the sons of Zebedee in the fishing business. This seems, however, to be a later

*On the location of this city, and the possibility of two cities on the shores of Galilee with the same name, see the very informative discussion in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. On the whole, it seems best to locate it on the west side of Galilee, as a "fishing village suburb" of Capernaum. This, I think, beyond a doubt, to be the home of Peter. Whether there was another Bethsaida in the same area is another question. Some would explain the above Scriptures by saying that Peter later *moved* to Capernaum from Bethsaida. "Peter and Andrew had dwelt at Bethsaida (Jn. 1:44). They may have removed to Capernaum, or Bethsaida, being near by, may be here counted as a part, or suburb, of Capernaum."—McGarvey on Mark 1:29.

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development, for in Matt. 4:18-22 Peter and Andrew are working together with their father and James and John are working together with theirs. After the Resurrection, Peter returned to his chosen trade with the words, "I go a fishing. (Jn. 21:3)."

7. If Peter had any formal education, other than that which was standard for a Jew of his day, we are not told of it in the Scriptures. In fact, the opposite seems to be true, according to the fourth chapter of Acts. The Sanhedrin, before whom Peter and John were arraigned for preaching of a resurrected Jesus, perceived that they were "unlearned" (*agrammatos*) men. The word is made up of two parts. The first "a" in the word deprives the rest of the word of its force, as in our prefix un-. The latter part of the word is from *gramma* (whence our word grammar)—literally, a letter, character in the alphabet. It also meant simply writing, or even a compilation of writings—a book. A *grammareus* was one skilled in writing, a scribe. The word came to be associated with one who was learned, especially in matters that pertained to reading and writing. Compare Jn. 7:15 where the Jews said of Jesus, "How knoweth this man letters (*grammata*) having never learned." Peter's background was not that of a "lettered" man.

The Sanhedrin also perceived Peter and John were "ignorant" men. The stigma now carried with this word is not in the original. Today if a man is termed "ignorant" he is usually thought of as a dull-witted or stupid individual. The word *idiotes* (whence our word idiot) cannot be so construed. It properly meant "one in private life" (Bagster) and, therefore, one who was devoid of special learning or gifts. We would say "just a plain person." In Greek writing it was used of a common soldier (as opposed to a military officer), a writer of prose (as opposed to a writer of poetry). Hence here "an unlearned, illiterate man, opposed to the

*This statement is not to be understood as a renouncing of his apostleship, much less of his faith. The apostles had to eat also. During their travels with Jesus, they were maintained by the kindness of the people and by what was placed in "the bag" (Jn. 12:6, 13:29). Perhaps there is a note of despair shown in his statement, but one must not be too quick to misrepresent his intentions. Remember, he had a wife (and probably children) to support.

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learned, the educated"—Thayer.*

What an illustration we have here of God taking a humble, common, ordinary person who was willing to be used of Him, and turning his life into a spiritual dynamo! How far-reaching was his influence! There was Paul—learned, educated, and in many ways refined. God used him! There was Peter—rough, uneducated, unlettered. God used him. Peter could say to those who needed help "What I have, that give I thee." Reader, are you giving what you *have* to God? Only the Lord Himself knows what He can do with *your life* if all is laid on the altar for Him!

8. Peter was among the "inner circle" apostles—a title given to Peter, James and John because of their intimacy with Christ during His ministry. It was these three apostles who witnessed:

- a. The raising of Jairus' daughter, Mk. 5:37.
- b. The Transfiguration, Matt. 17:1.
- c. The Lord's agony in Gethsemane, Matt. 26:37.
- d. These, along with Andrew, were the recipients of special instruction on future events, Mk. 13:3 ff.

9. His character and nature was enthusiastic and energetic, though sometimes impulsive and impetuous.

- a. When Jesus walked on the water, Mass. 14:22-33.
- b. His denial of Christ. Compare Lk. 22:31-34 with 22:54-62, or Matt. 26:31-34 with 26:69-75.
- c. His bold entrance into the empty tomb, in contrast to John's hesitance. Jn. 20:1-8.
- d. He was the first of the apostles to witness the Resurrection, I Cor. 15:5, Lk. 24:33-34.

10. His role as leader among the apostles and in the early church.

Even before Pentecost, his leadership ability is shown in that he was usually the spokesman for the apostles: Jn. 21:3, Matt. 16:13-16, 18:21, etc.

In every list of the apostles (Matt. 10:2-4, Mk. 3:16-19, Acts 1:13), Peter is mentioned first.

In the Book of Acts, he is by far the most prominent character next to the apostle Paul. This is especially seen in the early chapters. He was the first to preach the Gospel to the Jews (Chap. 2) and in his mission to Cornelius (Chapters 10 and 11), the first to

*A *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, by C. L. W. Grimm. Translated and enlarged by J. H. Thayer.

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formally and officially preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. In this way he opened the doors of the Lord's church with the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 16:19).

With the exception of the "dissimulation" at Antioch (Gal. 2:11-14), where Peter "drew back and separated himself" from the Gentiles for fear of the Jews, the remainder of his life is commendable as far as the Scriptures describe it. Time and again he is mistreated, threatened, imprisoned and beaten, but never again does he deny his Lord. His zeal and fidelity is nowhere better evidenced than Acts 4:13-20. With John, the Sanhedrin forbade him to speak at all in the name of Jesus. He replied, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard." Later, after being thrown into prison and miraculously delivered, they were again brought before the council. The high priest said, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name: and behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:28-29).

THE PLACE OF PETER'S EPISTLES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

If the Apostle Paul has placed emphasis on faith in his epistles, James on works, and John on love, Peter has stressed the need of persevering and consistent *hope*—particularly in the midst of trial and difficulty. He is, therefore, frequently termed, "The Apostle of Hope." Note that the subject of suffering for Christ is treated in *every single chapter* of his first letter, encouraging the Christians not to succumb to it. In his second epistle, the false teacher and deceiver is warned against in every chapter. But in both epistles the warnings are intended to *encourage the Christians toward steadfastness*, in view of their coming reward. Note I Pet. 1:13, 4:19, 5:12; II Pet. 1:12-15, 3:11-14, and especially II Pet. 3:1-2, where Peter himself tells us he has a common objective for both epistles.

INTRODUCTION TO I PETER

I. THE HUMAN AUTHOR.

Though some doubts and uncertainties were entertained in ancient times concerning the Petrine authorship of the second epistle, that Peter was the author of the first has never been seriously questioned. From the very beginning it was accepted as an inspired message from the Apostle whose name it bears (1:1, 5:

I PETER

12-13). The historical attestation to its authority as an apostolic document is more than adequate. Polycarp, a disciple of the Apostle John, was martyred in 156 A.D. at about 90 years of age. He refers to the epistle in unmistakable terms as authentic. Irenaeus (A.D. 115-195, Polycarp's disciple, quotes it many times.* Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150-216), cites it many times in his *Stromata*, one passage (4:8) being quoted five times by actual count. Eusebius, often called The Father of Church History (A.D. 260-340), said, "One epistle of Peter, called his first, is acknowledged. This the presbyters of ancient times have quoted in their writings, as undoubtedly genuine."**

II. THE HUMAN WRITER.

In 5:12 we have the statement, "By Silvanus I have written unto you briefly . . ." (Silvanus is another name for Silas, the traveling companion of Paul.) Some have supposed that Silvanus was involved in the composition of the letter as the writer or secretary, rather than the messenger. This is the view of A. T. Robertson, who also infers that Silvanus was, on occasion, *Paul's amanuensis*. By comparing II Thes. 3:17 with 1:1-2, one sees this as a possibility but not a certainty. The word here rendered "by" (*dia*) it is true, was sometimes used anciently of one who wrote for another. It basically means "through" or "by means of." But most critics have simply understood by this that the epistle was being sent *by* this "faithful brother."

In 1:1-2 we have two facts about those to whom this epistle was addressed: (1) they lived in Asia Minor (Turkey) and (2) they were Christians.

Some have thought that Peter, like James (Jas. 1:1) was addressing Jews exclusively. This error, it seems, has arisen mainly because of confusion concerning the term "dispersion." See comments, 1:1. That Peter does address his letter to Hebrew Christians seems obvious, for throughout the epistle he assumes the

*This was a very natural development. Peter's epistles were addressed to churches of Asia Minor, and most of Irenaeus' labors were in this area.

***Ecclesiastical History*, III, 23:3.

reader is familiar with the Old Testament and its terminology: 1:10-12, 2:5-9, 3:6.*

But it is also very obvious from even a superficial reading of the book, that the apostle intended Gentile Christians to receive and study it. See such passages as 2:10 (compared with Eph. 2:11-13) and 4:3. Peter's benediction is general; "unto you all that are in Christ" (5:4). True, the "Gentiles" are mentioned in the third person, 2:12, 4:3, but Peter consistently uses this term with reference to *wicked* Gentiles—heathens.

It seems best, therefore, to regard the epistle as being addressed to *all* Christians within the geographical boundaries specified.

IV. DATE OF WRITING.

Conjectured dates range from A.D. 58 to 64. We have one certain fact to guide us here: it was written before the destruction of Jerusalem, A.D. 70. There are several references to that history-making event within the epistle; 2:12, 4:7 (where see notes).

CHAPTER ONE

I. INTRODUCTION AND GREETING

1:1,2

1:1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,

Expanded Translation

Peter, a commissioned messenger of Jesus Christ sent forth with orders, to the selected and chosen ones who are journeying in a strange land to their heavenly home—those scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,

Peter

A descriptive proper name, signifying a stone, or a rock. Its Aramaic equivalent was Cephas. This name was given to Simon by the Lord Himself, in anticipation of the hard, staunch, unyielding "rock-like" character Christ knew this man would come to possess (Jn. 1:42). See the sketch of his life in the introduction.

*The strength of this oft-mentioned point, however, is questioned. In Paul's epistles to churches of largely Gentile converts, the Scriptures and terminology of the Old Testament are freely employed.