

WHO IS PETER? . . . AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

“Peter, an Apostle of Jesus Christ...” 1 Peter 1:1a

One of the first questions to ask about any book or letter is: Who is the author? While such a question is not the end-all in understanding a book's content, 1 Peter is particularly enriched by knowledge of the life of the author. Even a cursory examination of his life greatly enhances the study of the epistle. More could be said biographically about the Apostle, but below are just a few examples of how his life enriches the understanding of this letter.

I. The First...

- ◆ Disciple / Apostle of Jesus (Mt 10:2) “I will make you fishers of men” Mt 4:19
- ◆ Confessor of Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah (Mt 16:13ff, Mk 8:27ff, Lk 9:21ff, Jn 6:67ff)
- ◆ Christian preacher (Acts 2:14ff)
- ◆ Instrument of Christian healing (Acts 3:1ff) and raising of the dead (Acts 9:36ff)

Significance

The Apostles, along with the prophets, were to be the authoritative foundation of the Church (Eph 2:20). Their role, along with the other offices of the Church, is to “equip the saints *for works of service*” (Eph 4:11-13).

Significance to 1 Peter

As one who was sent personally by the resurrected Christ, Peter and his letter become authoritative for our lives. Furthermore, this authority is played out in lives which seek to build up the Church of Jesus Christ.

II. A Man Called Peter...or Cephas...or Simon...or Simeon...or Simon Peter

- ◆ Named Simon or Simeon, nicknamed “Rock”
- ◆ Foundation of the Church (Mt 16:18-19)

Significance

Rocks are symbolic of firmness, dependability and their invariability—characteristics which could not describe Peter before Pentecost. Jesus saw Peter, not for what he was, but for what he would become—a relatively firm individual to whom He would entrust the “keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 16:19).

Significance to 1 Peter

Peter clings to this metaphor, and like Paul, further adapts the analogy to incorporate all believers in Christ (e.g. chapter 2).

III. Persecuted for Christ

- ◆ Denied Christ under threat of persecution
- ◆ Arrested at least twice (Acts 4:1ff, Acts 12)
- ◆ Flogged and left “rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name” (Acts 5:40ff)
- ◆ Martyred in Rome under Nero

Significance

Though Peter at first wavered in his steadfastness, he and the other Apostles demonstrated their conviction of the truth of the Gospel of their Lord Jesus Christ and its power to change lives. Furthermore, the promise of persecution to the faithful by the Lord became a cause for rejoicing as they entered into the fellowship of the suffering with Christ. After Peter's initial denial, Peter would become a firm, dependable rock upon which the Church of Christ would be built.

Significance to 1 Peter

Suffering for the name of Christ is a major theme of 1 Peter. Peter's denial of Christ serves as a backdrop for the letter, though it is never mentioned in the letter. He is telling us from experience, “It is not worth it to cave into the pressures or pleasures of this dying world to sell out Christ!” Peter's sufferings and ultimate martyrdom suggest that he meant what he wrote.

IV. Called to Feed the Sheep of God

- ◆ Uncertain of his task after the resurrection, Peter returns to fishing (Jn. 21:1ff)
- ◆ Jesus commands Peter to “feed My sheep” out of his love of the Lord (Jn. 21:15-17)

Significance

The life and ministry of Peter must be seen in light of this command to “feed the sheep” of Jesus. This is an allusion to Ezekiel 34 where the Lord reprimands the religious leaders for failing to lead the people of God. The conversation and renewed confidence in Peter would thrust Peter headlong into a leadership role of the Apostles as well as the Church at large after Pentecost.

Significance to 1 Peter

The epistle must be seen in light of an attempt of Peter to “feed the sheep of God”—that is, you and me. It appears that he sees this role in light of Ezekiel 34 as he writes the epistle. Ezekiel describes shepherds who have neglected their flocks (vv. 1-10), how the Lord will gather the scattered sheep (11-16), the judgment of the sheep (17-22), and the promise of “one shepherd” who will bring peace and prosperity (23-31). These are all significant themes of the epistle.

Peter does not hoard this role of shepherd for himself. He calls on all elders to “shepherd the flock” (1 Peter 5:2) with Christ as the Chief Shepherd.