

1 PETER 1

1. 1 Peter has a curious property: almost every verse can be read as a parallel to some other NT passage (see below). What can you infer from this about the author's theology and/or when 1 Peter was written? How does this fit with your theory (if any) of authorship?

Parallels between 1 Peter and other NT writings:

1:1	Heb 11:13; James 1:1	2:2-6	Eph 2:18-22	3:8-9	Rom 12:16-17
1:2	Heb 12:24	2:5	Rom 12:1	3:9	Lk 6:28; Heb 12:17
1:3	Eph 1:3	2:6-8	Rom 9:32-33	3:14	Mt 5:10
1:3-5	Tit 3:4-7	2:7	Mt 21:42	3:18	Rom 6:10; Eph 2:18;
1:4	Mt 6:20	2:9	Tit 2:14; Rev 1:6; 5:10		Heb 9:28
1:6-7	Rom 5:3-5; James 1:2-3	2:10	Rom 9:25	3:22	Eph 1:20-22; Col 2:15
1:10-12	Eph 3:2-6	2:11	Heb 11:13; James 4:1	4:8	James 5:20
1:13	Mt 13:17	2:12	Mt 5:16	4:10-11	Rom 12:6-7
1:14	Rom 12:2; Eph 2:2-3	2:13-17	Rom 13:1-7	4:13	Mt 5:10
1:17	Lk 11:2	2:16	Gal 5:13	4:14	Mt 5:11; Heb 13:13
1:20	Eph 1:4	2:19-20	Lk 6:32-33	5:2	Acts 20:28
1:22	Rom 12:9-10	2:24	Rom 6:2, 11; Heb 10:10	5:4	Heb 13:20
1:23-2:2	James 1:10-11, 18-22;	2:25	Heb 13:20	5:5-9	James 4:6-10
2:1	Eph 4:25, 31; Tit 3:1;	3:1	Eph 5:22		
	James 1:21	3:1-6	1 Tim 2:9-14		

2. Peter encourages the churches in Asia Minor by emphasizing their new birth. He articulates the way it affects their attitudes, how it locates them in the eschatological timeline, and discusses the basis of this new birth in Christ, particularly from the perspective of God's redemptive plan in history.
Joel Green refers to the way the new birth acts on a believer's attitudes as a "conversion of the imagination":

Granted that the phrase "conversion of the imagination" is alien to 1 Peter, it is nonetheless helpful shorthand for grasping Peter's basic emphasis. By "imagination" I mean "a basic image-schematic capacity for ordering our experience," a life-world employing patterns of thought that are at once *conceptual* (a way of seeing things), *conative* (a set of beliefs and values to which a group and its members are deeply attached), and *action-guiding* (we live according to its terms). The issue is this: life-events do not come with self-contained and immediately obvious interpretations; rather, we conceptualize them in terms of imaginative structure that we take to be true, normal, and good. As a rule, the world-at-large casts a thick, dark cloud of despair over experiences of suffering, distress, trials and alien status. Peter insists that such experiences on the part of his audience must be read according to a radically different pattern of thought—one that

grows out of new birth. “New birth,” then, as a dramatic metaphor for the decisive transformation of life that has come in accordance of with God’s mercy and by means of the resurrection of Jesus. What Peter announces, then, is a conversion of the imagination: personal reconstruction within a new web of relationships, resocialization within the new community, and the embodiment of a new life-world evidenced in altered dispositions and attitudes.¹

Psychologists have long used *reframing* as a technique for reducing stress and coping with difficult situations.² As an example, one might put one’s situation in context by recognizing that on a global scale, ours are “first-world” problems, and really we have it well off by comparison with many others. Alternately (as Green suggests) we might explore what we think of as “normal” to see if it legitimately includes what we are enduring.

- a. Is Peter reframing? How do (or don’t) you see this in the text of 1:1-9?
 - b. What stresses in your life feel wrong, abnormal, or not part of the (God’s) plan for you? Are they normal when viewed within Peter’s eschatological framework?
 - c. The Greek behind v. 6 (“In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials”) “masks the Greek phrase, ‘it being necessary,’ a phrase that suggests that God requires such testing.”³ The amount of suffering endured by Christians varies widely throughout the church universal, from extreme from (rural!) China and some Islamic to often minor to non-existent in the West. What’s normal for the kingdom of God in this world?
3. More than any other epistle save Hebrews and Revelation, 1 Peter draws upon OT images and ideas. For instance, chapter 1 draws a parallel between the exodus and the first-century church context.

Following are elements of the exodus story⁴.

- i. Hebrews leaving Egypt were told to gird up their loins for quick departure (Ex 12:11); *Peter says, “Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed” (1:13)*
- ii. In the desert the Israelites murmured and wanted to return to the fleshpots of Egypt (Ex 16:2-3); *Peter warns, “Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance” (1:14)*
- iii. Moses was ordered to tell the people whom God was making his own, “Be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy” (Lev 19:2); *Peter exhorts, “Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct”*

¹ *1 Peter* (Two Horizons New Testament Commentary, 2007).

² This term refers more to a coping mechanism than to a deep cognitive reorientation; if 1 Peter or Rom 12:1-2 have a cognitive reorientation in mind it is surely deeper than this.

³ Pheme Perkins, *First and Second Peter, James, and Jude* (1995), p...

⁴ This list is taken, including wording, from Raymond Brown’s *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind*, ch. 5, p. 77-8.

- iv. Israel wandered in the desert before it reached its inheritance in the promised land; *Peter acknowledges they aren't home yet either: "live in reverent fear during the time of your exile" (1:17; 1:4)*
- v. Prophets and patriarchs use redemption and even the paying of a ransom as figures of speech to describe God's liberation of his people from Egypt (Ex 6:5-6; Deut 7:8; Isa 52:3); *Peter says, "you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors..." (1:18)*
- vi. Israelites worshiped the a calf made with silver and gold taken from their Egyptian neighbors at the time of the tenth plague; yet were spared from that plague by the blood of the unblemished Passover lamb marking their houses (Ex 32:1-12; 11:2; 12:5-7); *Peter says, "you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, 19but with the precious blood of Christ." (1:18-19)*

- a. How did the Passover and Exodus stories give comfort to Jews of Peter's day?
 - b. How would Peter's words have brought comfort to first-century Christians suffering in Asia Minor? What exhortations does Peter give in 1:13-16? How would Peter's parallel with the story of Israel have motivated his readers to obey Peter's exhortations in 1:13-16?
 - c. Just as 21st-century Western culture differs from first-century Roman culture, so our context differs from that of the early church. Are Peter's words relevant to us as well? Is there any way in which it would encourage you or strengthen your faith to explore your identity as a member of the chosen people?
4. Jewish cultural identity in the first century was strengthened and maintained even in dispersion by the key cultural markers of the kosher laws, the Sabbath, and circumcision. Each of these was radically altered or removed by the Gospel of Jesus. How, then, was it possible for a Gentile convert to see identify him or herself with the chosen people—as Peter does for them here?
- a. What methods does Peter use in chapter 1 to "form a community consciousness at home in the Jewish diaspora?" [Green, 33] How do you see Peter both creating a community consciousness and developing distinguishing characteristics?
 - b. How has the church survived? By the same markers Peter promotes, or others, or by some other method?

5. Peter presents a before and after description of believers in 1:13-18:

Formerly	Now
Ignorance of God (1:14)	knowledge of Christ and of God (13-14)
Are not God's children/people (2:10)	are God's children/people (1:14)
Controlled by desires (1:14)	controlled by obedience to God (1:14)
Affirmed by society	misunderstood and maligned by society
Futile way of life (1:18)	holy way of life (1:15)

How is futility the opposite of holiness? What aspects of your life in Christ are seen as pursuit of holiness? Do these also seem directed?

6. Peter refers to “all kinds of trials” (1:6); suffering in general (3:13-17); those who speak against believers (3:16; 4:5). Peter calls their sufferings a “fiery ordeal” (4:13) and says they share in the sufferings of Christ (4:13) because they bear his name (4:14, 16).
- Is Peter referring to the trials of first-century life (illness, poverty, death), or something more?
 - Peter says, “Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings” (5:9). Some have taken this to mean that this was during a period of empire-wide persecution. The three relevant possibilities for general and official persecution are Nero (64-65), Domitian (90-95) and Trajan (97-117). On the other hand, Raymond Brown points out,

“By refusing to engage in the quasi-religious customs surrounding the official Roman governmental structures, by resolutely setting themselves against some of the immoral practices prevalent at the time, and by meeting so often on their own to celebrate the Lord's Supper, Christians were regarded with suspicion and hostility. The readers of 1 Peter were probably being criticized, mocked, discriminated against, and perhaps even brought into court on trumped-up charges. This situation fully explains the references to suffering in 1 Peter—including 5:10, since Christians throughout the empire were indeed suffering this same kind of treatment, and 4:14, 16, since the readers were indeed suffering because they followed Christ and bore his name.”⁵

Do you think the persecution described by Peter is official and general or is the sort of local unofficial persecution Brown describes? What implications would it have?



Fun fact: “The idea that Peter was crucified upside down actually comes from the apocryphal *Acts of Peter*, a fanciful second-century work that usually is given little credibility by religious scholars. In this case, however, the work devotes several paragraphs to explaining why Peter was crucified in this manner: Peter himself requested it and then explained the elaborate and esoteric symbolism of the act (something like birth imagery, recalling Adam). Elsewhere, the Jewish historian Josephus notes that soldiers sometimes amused themselves by crucifying criminals in different positions, so it is possible that the *Acts of Peter* is not inventing the story but rather supplying theological reasons to explain an actual fact regarding Peter’s execution (a humiliating detail passed over by others).” [Powell, 466]

Shorter Fun Fact: Vv 3-12 are, in the Greek, a single sentence.

⁵ Raymond Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament*.