

Walking Out the Word:

The First Epistle of Peter

Important Background to the First Epistle of Peter:

- The Apostle Peter wrote this circular letter to the “pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia” (1:1). Peter is writing to the Christian sojourners scattered in a variety of Roman provinces in Northwest Asia Minor which is now located in modern Turkey.
- Peter was originally known as Simon, which means “shifting sand.” Jesus renamed him Peter, or Cephas (Greek), which means “rock” (John 1:42). Jesus gave him a new name and then helped him to live up to it. Peter began as a rugged fisherman who left his nets (Mark 1:18), walked on water (Mt 14:29), and rose to be the leading spokesman of the disciples. Although Peter denied Jesus at the cross, he did live up to his name after the resurrection and preached a sermon at Pentecost where 3,000 were saved (Acts 2). He rose to be the Apostle to the Jews, who also received Cornelius as the first Gentile convert (Acts 10). Peter was known to travel and minister with his wife.
- Peter is writing during a time of the threat of persecution where believers faced a variety of trials (1:6). Christians had previously been protected by the Roman government who did not distinguish between Christians and Jews. Judaism was a permitted religion in Rome until the time of Nero.
- On July 19th 64 AD, the Great Fire of Rome ravaged and destroyed ancient shrines, landmarks and family homes as the unhindered flames lasted for 3 days and 3 nights. The people blamed Nero for the fire and accused him of joyfully watching the flames burn while his helpers rekindled the fires rather than putting them out. Nero, known for his obsession with building, was believed to purposefully destroy Rome in order to build it again.
- Nero chose a scapegoat to deflect accusations concerning the fire. The Christians were already being slandered as a suspicious sect. Using the words of Jesus which challenged people to “eat His flesh” and “drink His blood” (John 6:53), his followers were accused of cannibalism when they partook of communion. False stories and accusations began to spread. Christians were also accused of breaking the bonds of family relationships which indeed happened when some in a family became Christians and others did not. False accusations and rumors spread through Roman provinces. Nero began to savagely murder Christian families in the coliseums, nail them on crosses, and covering them with tar, setting them aflame to use them as torches to add light at night to his garden.
- Peter wrote to encourage the believers in Roman provinces, who now were experiencing the same type of persecution that had begun in Rome, which Peter covertly calls “Babylon” (5:13). Christianity was no longer a permitted religion, but essentially to be a Christian meant that you were an outlaw. Peter wrote to encourage them in their “fiery trial” (4:12) and exhort them to “rejoice” as they partake in the “Christ’s sufferings” (4:13). He challenges them to look to a “living hope” through the resurrection of Jesus Christ and to look forward to their “inheritance incorruptible and undefiled” (1:3-4).
- Peter exhorts believers to embrace *submission* (Greek: *hupotasso*) which releases kingdom power and joy (2:13, 28; 3:1, 7; 5:5). The Greek word “hupotasso” is a military term which literally means “to stand under.” In the midst of trial, Peter calls the flock to divine order. Living in *prophetic assignment* and by *proper alignment* equipped the flock to join together in humility, resisting the devil, who Peter said “walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (5:5-11). Today, we too are called to walk in fortitude and purity as we face various trials.

Things to talk about in Walking Out the Word:

- *Opening:* Talk about what life was like for the Christians that Peter was writing this epistle to, compared to life today in our culture. How would Peter view the culture that we live in and the “trials” that we face?
- *1 Peter 1 and 2:* How does Peter describe salvation in 1:1-12? How would this encourage those that he was writing to? What does it mean to “gird up the loins of your mind?” (1:13). How does this phrase relate to battle? How are we living stones (2:4)? What does it mean to be a “chosen generation” (2:9)? Allow time for a couple of people in the Word group to give testimony about how they were personally called “out of darkness” into His light (2:9).
- *1 Peter 3, 4 and 5:* Peter outlines the necessity of divine order in his epistle. Why is submission a biblical concept? How is it important in married life? What is the cultural context of Peter’s discussion of submission of wives (3:1-7) and servants (2:13) and in suffering (4:12-14)? What does it mean to be “submissive to one another” (5:5) in the body of Christ? Discuss how *proper alignment* is knowing who is over you in *leadership*, who is beside you in *partnership*, and who is under you in *stewardship*. How do these concepts help you live a fully blessable life as a believer? (Pastor Dale Evrist expounds on these principals in his book *The Mighty Hand of God*).
- *Closing:* Close by taking time to pray that godly character, endurance, holiness, and humility would be developed in the lives of each person in your Word group especially through particular times of trials.

Walking Out the Word:
The Second Epistle of Peter

Important Background to the Second Epistle of Peter:

- The Second Epistle of Peter provides guidance and encouragement from the apostle Peter when he was facing the end of his life (1:12-15). Traditionally Peter and his wife were believed to have been martyred by Nero after the great fire in Rome. Peter is believed to have been crucified upside down because he did not think he was worthy to die in the same manner as Jesus did.
- Second Peter almost did not make it into the canon of Scripture, primarily because it differs in style and content to First Peter. Most conservative scholars continue to attribute this epistle to Peter and believe that the differences can be attributed to the uniqueness of the different secretaries used by Peter to write. First Peter was written by Silas (1 Peter 5:12) and the second letter could have been written by another secretary who served Peter.
- Second Peter reproves people who distort scripture (1:20; 3:16); those who covet (2:3, 14, 15); those who lust, are presumptuous, proud and self-willed (2:10, 18); those who return to their former corrupt lifestyle (2:20-21).
- Peter is warning against false teachers, who use God's mercy as a rationalization for sinning. These false teachers also denied the second coming of Christ (3:3-4).
- Second Peter looks at issues that are relevant to the contemporary church such as: the need to nurture Christian maturity; warning against false teachers; combating worldliness. We are in the midst of a war over the truth.

Things to talk about in Walking Out the Word:

- *Opening:* As you introduce Second Peter, discuss ways that the church is presently in a "truth war."
- *2 Peter 1, 2, and 3:* Of the seven virtues listed in 1:5-7, which two virtues do you most need to cultivate in your life? Describe the false teachers that Peter identifies in chapter 2. How is the modern church plagued with the same type of deception? Have you met people who are "wells without water"? What do you learn about the return of Christ in chapter 3?
- *Closing:* Pray for one another that each of us will be clear-minded and discerning, understanding the times we live in.