

SHAPED BY SCRIPTURE

The Hope You Have

1 & 2 PETER

DAN BOONE

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The Foundry Publishing
PO Box 419527
Kansas City, MO 64141
thefoundrypublishing.com

978-0-8341-4127-8

Printed in the
United States of America

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Cover Design: J. R. Caines
Interior Design: J. R. Caines
Layout: Jeff Gifford

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Introduction

THE *SHAPED BY* *SCRIPTURE* SERIES

The first step of an organized study of the Bible is the selection of a biblical book that a reader plans to study. Often people pick a book they are most familiar with, or books they consider as easy to understand, or books that, according to popular opinion, have more relevance to Christians today than other books of the Bible. However, it is important to recognize the truth that God's Word is not limited to a few books. All the biblical books, both individually and collectively, communicate God's Word to us. As Paul affirms in 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." We interpret the term "God-breathed" to mean inspired by God. If Christians are going to take 2 Timothy 3:16 seriously, then we should all set the goal of encountering God's Word through all sixty-six books of the Bible. New Christians or those with little to no prior knowledge of the Bible might find it best to start with a New Testament book like 1 John, James, or the Gospel of John.

By purchasing this volume, you have chosen to study the books of 1 & 2 Peter. You've made a great choice because these two epistles offer the people of God words of wisdom for difficult times. They were written to help churches scattered across the Roman Empire remember God's mission and realign themselves with that mission. Because these books are short, they are perfect for a study like this one, whose goal is to illustrate an appropriate method of studying the Bible.

How This Study Works

This Bible study is intended for a period of seven weeks. We have chosen a specific passage for each week's study. This study can be done individually or with a small group.

For individual study, we recommend a five-day study each week, following the guidelines given below:

- 1 On the first day of the study, read the relevant passage several times until you become fully familiar with the verses, words, and phrases.
- 2 On the second day, we will review the setting and organization of the passage.
- 3 On the third day, we will observe some of the realities portrayed in the passage.
- 4 On the fourth day, we will investigate the relationship of the individual passage to the larger story of God in the Bible.
- 5 On the fifth day, we will reflect on the function of the story as we hear it today, the invitation it extends to us, and our response to God, who speaks through God's Word.

If this Bible study is done as a group activity, we recommend that members of the group meet together on the sixth day to share and discuss what they have learned from God's Word and how it has transformed their lives.

You may want to have a study Bible to give you additional insights as we work through 1 & 2 Peter. Other helpful resources are *Discovering the New Testament* and *1 & 2 Peter/Jude: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, both available from The Foundry Publishing.

Literary Forms in the Bible

There are several literary forms represented throughout the Bible. The divinely inspired writers used various techniques to communicate God's Word to their ancient audiences. The major literary forms (also known as genres) of the Bible are:

- narratives
- laws
- history
- Wisdom literature (in the form of dialogues and proverbial statements)
- poetry (consisting of poems of praise, lament, trust in God, and more)
- prophecy
- discourses
- parables
- miracle stories
- letters (also known as epistles)
- exhortations
- apocalyptic writings

Within each of these forms, one may find subgenres. Each volume in the *Shaped by Scripture* series will briefly overview the genres found in the book of the Bible that is the subject of that study.

When biblical writers utilized a particular literary form, they intended for it to have a specific effect on their audience. This concept can be understood by examining genres that are familiar to us in our contemporary setting. For example, novels that are comedies inspire good and happy feelings in their readers; tragedies, on the other hand, are meant to induce sorrow. What is true of the intended effect of literary forms in contemporary literature is also true of literary forms found in the Bible.

Introduction



1 & 2 PETER

When asked if he had ever been lost, American pioneer Daniel Boone replied, “No. But I was once bewildered for three days.” That may be the best way to describe the state of the church of Jesus today—not exactly lost, but bewildered. We are trying to navigate Christian life in a changing world.

Our formation as the people of God is based on the belief that we are the elect, chosen by the Creator to reflect the image of Christ to the world. We exist for our neighbors, loving rather than conquering, being hospitable rather than defensive.

The way of Christianity is (or should be) different from the ways of worldly power. This makes the world see Christians as a threat. We find ourselves using language like “strangers” and “exiles” to describe our existence in the world. In cases like these, it is helpful to ask, “When have God’s people been here before?”

One answer, of course, is the Babylonian exile. We find another answer in Peter’s pastoral epistles. From the opening address of 1 Peter to the dispersed exiles, to the warnings in 2 Peter against false teachings, these letters seem to reflect our own context today.

Who Wrote 1 & 2 Peter?

The authorship of these two letters seems straightforward, since the writer is named in the first verses as Peter and Simon Peter, respectively. But scholars do not find the answer to be so simple. There are three common theories about the authorship of 1 Peter.

First, the writer may indeed be Peter, the apostle of Jesus who led the early church. In this case, the letter could be seen as his final instructions and evidence of his concern for the church as it spread beyond Jerusalem.

A second option is that it was written by Silas (or Silvanus), who served Peter. In this case, Silas could have written the words Peter dictated to him, used Peter's collected writings, or summarized Peter's thoughts. Summarizing an apostle's ideas was a task that servants commonly performed, whether during an apostle's lifetime or after the apostle's death. In this case, the letter would have Peter's name on it because it contained his ideas, even if someone else wrote them down.

A third possibility is that the letter was written by the "school of Peter." The early Christian community often formed schools that were similar to rabbinical schools in that they taught and trained students in the style of a specific teacher. The school of Peter could have existed well beyond the apostle's death and sought to continue his legacy by addressing the church in pseudonymous letters. In this case, the apostle's name would have given the letters authority, even if they were written after the beloved leader's death.

Second Peter seems less mysterious to scholars. It is more than likely pseudonymous—written under Simon Peter's name by someone familiar with his teachings. (Not every pseudonymous book was accepted into the canon of Scripture—more were rejected than accepted.) A disciple could have written these letters from Rome after Peter's death in an attempt to warn the church against false teachings. Using Peter's name would have given the letter more authority. Scholars tend to agree that there are ample clues to suggest that the person who wrote 2 Peter is not the same person who wrote 1 Peter. Authorship questions notwithstanding, this study will refer to the author of both epistles as "Peter" for the sake of expediency.

These uncertainties about authorship should not affect our confidence in these important biblical epistles. We should remain open in our thinking where scholarship has not reached settled conclusions—it is not healthy for Christians to stake their claims of biblical authority on such issues. The primary question regarding the authority of Scripture is the way the Spirit speaks through it to the church. If we hear and obey the Spirit, then Scripture is authoritative for us.

Literary Form

Both 1 and 2 Peter are letters (or epistles) from a leader to several congregations, but we do not know if they were written to the same congregations. In fact, based on clues found in the texts, scholars think it is likely that they were written to and for different audiences. Both letters contain common features of first-century communication, including opening greetings, identification of the writer and intended readers, blessings, the raising of issues of concern, teachings, directives, and closing salutations.

Entering the Story

Reading an epistle is like overhearing one end of a phone conversation. We see what the writer says, but can only imagine what prompted the letter and how the recipients might have reacted. Yet the early church selected these letters for inclusion among the books of the Bible because they believed these words were for all believers everywhere. The Petrine epistles help the people of God understand their position in the world. While the issues in these letters are ancient, their implications are current for the church today. Therefore, we are among the intended recipients. The Holy Spirit is active in the gap between us and the text; we become actors engaged in the unfolding drama.

God speaks to us through the texts of the Bible so that we may be formed in the image of Jesus. When we see ourselves in the original audience, we hear the same Spirit who spoke to them also speaking to us. We can then offer the same obedience that God desired of the original readers. The Spirit is at work forming saints through our faithful obedience to God's revealed truth.

Major Theological Themes

The following themes form a theological framework for understanding the issues of 1 and 2 Peter.



We are divinely elected. The term “election” describes God’s choice of Israel as a servant people through whom the world would be blessed. Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel. Thus, Jesus’s followers become God’s elect people in the same way that Israel is, for the sake of witness.



We live in exile. We have little security as we live among powers that are suspicious of or hostile toward us.



We are eschatological travelers on the way to God’s tomorrow. Eschatology is the doctrine that imagines our destiny—the future to which God calls us. Especially in these letters, this future is also called “the day of the Lord.”



Some believers will defect from the faith. This issue has always been a cause for concern among God’s people. From the worship of idols in the Old Testament to the compromises with pagan cultures in the New Testament, God’s people are susceptible to defection.



Some believers will assimilate to the sinful culture. Many Christians never leave the faith, but compromise their devotion by failing to fully obey God.



Jesus is our model for Christian suffering. Jesus is the suffering servant of God who was prefigured in Isaiah. His example indicates that, as his followers, we too will endure suffering, and we too are empowered to glorify God through our suffering.



Some will try to lead us astray with false teachings. We should guard against teachings that sound good, but are not actually Christlike.



Scripture is our guidebook. New Testament audiences had the Old Testament to guide them, as well as the newly circulating stories about Jesus. Today, we have both testaments to teach and guide us.



Jesus is coming back. We should live like the second coming could happen at any moment. We anticipate Christ's return by living out God's mission and Christ's gospel in the world.



Week One: Prayer of Blessing and Thanksgiving

1 PETER 1:1-12

From the beginning to the end of 1 Peter, the primary metaphor for the people of God is *exiles*. Indeed, the book starts by calling them exiles in 1 Peter 1:1 (some translations read “exiles of the dispersion”). In 5:13, they are described as the elect brothers and sisters of God’s people in Babylon (referring to the Old Testament exile story). Understanding this metaphor is essential to understanding the letter’s function in the early church.

Old Testament Israel understood their exile in Babylon to be temporary. They lived in hope of going home. Their hearts yearned for the temple in Jerusalem, the songs of Zion, Jewish culture, and a Jewish calendar. Displacement was not just a temporary inconvenience, but a challenge to their identity. Surrounded by a pagan culture, they were at risk of assimilation. And indeed, throughout their history, Israel was prone to worship the gods of other tribes. Even if they did not renounce their faith in the God of Abraham, they often compromised that faith by adopting the ways of other gods and building altars to them. As their history attests, defection was in their genes.

This is why the exile metaphor is at the heart of this letter. The people of God are a threatened minority living in cities where God’s ways are strange, and pagan powers surround them. Their identity is up for grabs; the pressure to compromise is relentless. Throughout history, God’s people have always felt the dominant culture’s pull. The book of 1 Peter is about resisting this pull by remembering who we are and where we are headed.

WEEK 1, DAY 1

Absorb 1 Peter 1:1-12 by reading it aloud several times until you become familiar with its verses, words, and phrases.