

First and Second Peter, Jude

Daniel Keating



Baker Academic

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Daniel Keating, First and Second Peter, Jude
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2011. Used by permission

© 2011 by Daniel Keating

Published by Baker Academic
a division of Baker Publishing Group
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakeracademic.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Keating, Daniel A.

First and Second Peter, Jude / Daniel Keating.

p. cm. — (Catholic commentary on sacred scripture)

Includes bibliographical references and indexes.

ISBN 978-0-8010-3645-3 (pbk.)

1. Bible. N.T. Peter—Commentaries. 2. Bible. N.T. Jude—Commentaries. I. Title.

BS2795353.K43 2011

227.92077—dc23

2011026117

Nihil obstat:

Msgr. Robert Lunsford

Censor librorum

Imprimatur:

Most Rev. Earl Boyea

Bishop of Lansing

Printed with ecclesiastical permission, May 27, 2011.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible®, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations labeled ESV are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. ESV Text Edition: 2007

Scripture quotations labeled NIV are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

Scripture quotations labeled NJB are from THE NEW JERUSALEM BIBLE, copyright © 1985 by Darton, Longman & Todd, Ltd. and Doubleday, a division of Random House, Inc. Reprinted by permission.

Scripture quotations labeled NRSV are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations labeled RSV are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1952 [2nd edition, 1971] by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

11 12 13 14 15 16 17 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



Daniel Keating, First and Second Peter, Jude
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2011. Used by permission

Contents

Illustrations	9
Editors' Preface	11
Abbreviations	15

Introduction to 1 Peter 17

Outline of 1 Peter	25
Address and Greeting (1:1–2)	26
Opening Blessing and Proclamation (1:3–12)	30
New Way of Life in God's Household (1:13–2:10)	39
Order in Relationships (2:11–3:12)	58
Faithfulness in Suffering for Christ (3:13–4:19)	82
Concluding Exhortations (5:1–11)	112
Final Greetings (5:12–14)	123

Introduction to 2 Peter 127

Outline of 2 Peter	135
Address and Greeting (1:1–2)	136
Reminder of the Power and Promises of God (1:3–21)	138
Condemnation of False Teachers (2:1–22)	156
The Return of the Lord (3:1–16)	173
Final Exhortation and Doxology (3:17–18)	188

Introduction to Jude 191

Outline of Jude	196
Opening of the Letter (1:1–4)	197

The Case against the False Teachers (1:5–19) 202

Closing of the Letter (1:20–25) 214

Suggested Resources 221

Glossary 223

Index of Pastoral Topics 229

Index of Sidebars 231

Map 233

Illustrations

- Figure 1. Map of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia 27
- Figure 2. The Western Wall of the Temple in Jerusalem 53
- Figure 3. Roman slave collar 66
- Figure 4. Icon of Christ despoiling Hades 89
- Figure 5. The Apostle Peter as Shepherd of the Flock 113
- Figure 6. Peter's death by crucifixion 148
- Figure 7. Mount Tabor 155
- Figure 8. Pagan revelry 171
- Figure 9. Jude 198
- Figure 10. A fruitless tree 209

Editors' Preface

The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord. . . . All the preaching of the Church should be nourished and governed by Sacred Scripture. For in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them; and the power and goodness in the word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons and daughters, the food of the soul, a pure and perennial fountain of spiritual life.

Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum* 21

Were not our hearts burning while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?

Luke 24:32

The Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture aims to serve the ministry of the Word of God in the life and mission of the Church. Since Vatican Council II, there has been an increasing hunger among Catholics to study Scripture in depth and in a way that reveals its relationship to liturgy, evangelization, catechesis, theology, and personal and communal life. This series responds to that desire by providing accessible yet substantive commentary on each book of the New Testament, drawn from the best of contemporary biblical scholarship as well as the rich treasury of the Church's tradition. These volumes seek to offer scholarship illumined by faith, in the conviction that the ultimate aim of biblical interpretation is to discover what God has revealed and is still speaking through the sacred text. Central to our approach are the principles taught by Vatican II: first, the use of historical and literary methods to discern what the

biblical authors intended to express; second, prayerful theological reflection to understand the sacred text “in accord with the same Spirit by whom it was written”—that is, in light of the content and unity of the whole Scripture, the living tradition of the Church, and the analogy of faith (*Dei Verbum* 12).

The Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture is written for those engaged in or training for pastoral ministry and others interested in studying Scripture to understand their faith more deeply, to nourish their spiritual life, or to share the good news with others. With this in mind, the authors focus on the meaning of the text for faith and life rather than on the technical questions that occupy scholars, and they explain the Bible in ordinary language that does not require translation for preaching and catechesis. Although this series is written from the perspective of Catholic faith, its authors draw on the interpretation of Protestant and Orthodox scholars and hope these volumes will serve Christians of other traditions as well.

A variety of features are designed to make the commentary as useful as possible. Each volume includes the biblical text of the New American Bible (NAB), the translation approved for liturgical use in the United States. In order to serve readers who use other translations, the most important differences between the NAB and other widely used translations (RSV, NRSV, JB, NJB, and NIV) are noted and explained. Each unit of the biblical text is followed by a list of references to relevant Scripture passages, Catechism sections, and uses in the Roman Lectionary. The exegesis that follows aims to explain in a clear and engaging way the meaning of the text in its original historical context as well as its perennial meaning for Christians. Reflection and Application sections help readers apply Scripture to Christian life today by responding to questions that the text raises, offering spiritual interpretations drawn from Christian tradition or providing suggestions for the use of the biblical text in catechesis, preaching, or other forms of pastoral ministry.

Interspersed throughout the commentary are Biblical Background sidebars that present historical, literary, or theological information, and Living Tradition sidebars that offer pertinent material from the postbiblical Christian tradition, including quotations from Church documents and from the writings of saints and Church Fathers. The Biblical Background sidebars are indicated by a photo of urns that were excavated in Jerusalem, signifying the importance of historical study in understanding the sacred text. The Living Tradition sidebars are indicated by an image of Eadwine, a twelfth-century monk and scribe, signifying the growth in the Church's understanding that comes by the grace of the Holy Spirit as believers study and ponder the word of God in their hearts (see *Dei Verbum* 8).

A map and a Glossary are located in the back of each volume for easy reference. The glossary explains key terms from the biblical text as well as theological or exegetical terms, which are marked in the commentary with a cross (†). A list of Suggested Resources, an Index of Pastoral Topics, and an Index of Sidebars are included to enhance the usefulness of these volumes. Further resources, including questions for reflection or discussion, can be found at the series website, www.CatholicScriptureCommentary.com.

It is our desire and prayer that these volumes be of service so that more and more “the word of the Lord may speed forward and be glorified” (2 Thess 3:1) in the Church and throughout the world.

Peter S. Williamson
Mary Healy
Kevin Perrotta

Note to Readers

The New American Bible differs slightly from most English translations in its verse numbering of the Psalms and certain other parts of the Old Testament. For instance, Ps 51:4 in the NAB is Ps 51:2 in other translations; Mal 3:19 in the NAB is Mal 4:1 in other translations. Readers who use different translations are advised to keep this in mind when looking up Old Testament cross-references given in the commentary.

Introduction to 1 Peter

The First Letter of Peter is a hidden gem, tucked away among the † catholic epistles, just waiting to be discovered.¹ Overshadowed by the longer and weightier letters of Paul, 1 Peter has often been neglected or undervalued.² My aim in this commentary is to aid the reader in discovering the riches of this letter, in the hope that he or she may hear its proclamation of the † gospel anew and follow the call to suffer joyfully with Christ.

Aim of 1 Peter

It was the common practice of early Church commentaries on the Bible to identify the aim of a given biblical book right from the start.³ What, then, is the aim of 1 Peter? Peter writes to the churches in five regions (see 1:1) to prepare them for suffering in imitation of Christ. As members of God’s household, they need to know their new identity in Christ, learn how to relate to others both within and outside the Church, and be ready to undergo affliction for their faith. In fact, the characteristic feature of this letter is the sharp contrast between the sober call to suffer in imitation of Christ and the “indescribable joy” (1:8) that is ours because of our new standing in Christ. Like a symphony that moves back and forth between major and minor keys, 1 Peter oscillates between the

1. Donald P. Senior, *1 Peter*, SP (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 3, claims that “the First Letter of Peter is one of the New Testament’s most eloquent and theologically rich books.”

2. First Peter received some commentary in the patristic and early medieval periods (e.g., Clement of Alexandria, Didymus the Blind, Bede the Venerable) but considerably less than the Epistles of Paul. For a thorough bibliography of 1 Peter in the Christian † tradition, see John H. Elliott, *1 Peter*, AB (Doubleday: New York, 2000), 155–304.

3. In the Church Fathers, this was called the *skopos*, the “aim” or “purpose,” of the biblical book.

expression of profound joy on the one hand and the call to endure trials on the other. Peter's aim is to show that the Christian life, characterized by a living hope and deep joy, will also be marked by suffering for the sake of Christ.

Authorship and Date

Until recently the unanimous judgment of the Christian tradition was that 1 Peter was written by the apostle Peter in Rome during the final years of his life, sometime in the early 60s. We find probable allusions to 1 Peter already in the *First Letter of Clement* (dated to 95) and citations in Polycarp's *Letter to the Philippians* (dated 108–25).⁴ Irenaeus of Lyons, writing about the year 180, is the first to confirm Peter's authorship of the letter.⁵ This judgment is endorsed by Tertullian (c. 200), Clement of Alexandria (c. 220), and the early Church historian Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 325), among others.⁶

Doubts about Peter's authorship arose in the early modern period with the rise of historical-critical biblical scholarship. For a time, the predominant view among scholars was that 1 Peter actually came from the Pauline school and was dependent on Paul's teaching. This view no longer commands the field. The present consensus among those who do *not* accept Peter's direct authorship is that the author is one of Peter's disciples in Rome, writing after Peter's death sometime between the years 70 and 95.⁷ Still, a set of contemporary scholars make the case for Peter's authorship and argue that the evidence against Peter as author is not as compelling as many scholars have claimed.⁸

What are the grounds put forward for questioning Peter's authorship of this letter? First, many conclude that a Galilean fisherman whose native language was [†]Aramaic could not have written the quality of Greek that 1 Peter displays. Second, many question whether the Christian mission extended to all the regions mentioned in 1:1 by the time of Peter's death. Further objections arise from the perceived historical and literary context of the letter, leading many to conclude that the letter belongs to a period late in the first century, after Peter's death.⁹

4. For example, *1 Clement* 1.1–2 (1 Pet 1:1–2, 17); 49.5 (1 Pet 4:8); *Polycarp* 1.3 (1 Pet 1:8); 8.2 (1 Pet 2:21).

5. *Adversus Haereses (Against Heresies)* 4.9.2; 4.16.5; 5.7.2.

6. For a complete list of citations of 1 Peter in Tertullian, Clement, Eusebius, and other early Church Fathers, see Elliott, *1 Peter*, 138–48.

7. For a summary of this conclusion, see Elliott, *1 Peter*, 127–30.

8. For example, Norman Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), 1–3; Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 14–19.

9. For a full list of objections raised against Peter's authorship, see Jobes, *1 Peter*, 6–14; Elliott, *1 Peter*, 120–22.

Defenders of Peter's authorship propose that Peter may have dictated the letter to a colleague who rendered Peter's words into elegant Greek. We know that Paul himself dictated several of his letters (1 Cor 16:21; Col 4:18; 2 Thess 3:17; Philem 1:19). Many scholars identify Silvanus as Peter's scribe, but the reference to the author writing "through Silvanus" (5:12) most probably refers to Silvanus as the bearer, not the writer, of the letter. Others argue that Peter could have learned to write in Greek at the level we find in 1 Peter, given at least two decades of mission work.¹⁰ One recent study concludes that the Greek of 1 Peter is not as polished as many have claimed, that it shows signs of being written by a native †Semitic speaker, and that it is within the ability of a non-native Greek speaker to learn.¹¹

The objection against the Christian mission to Asia Minor is not weighty. There is no strong historical case against Christian presence in these regions by the 60s, and Peter could be writing to churches that he did not establish directly. In response to the objections from historical and literary context, a majority of scholars, even of those who reject Peter's authorship, no longer judge the evidence to demand a late first-century date.¹² More positively, there are some striking similarities between 1 Peter and Peter's speeches in the Acts of the Apostles. While this does not prove Peter's direct authorship, it shows that the thought and language of 1 Peter is consistent with what is recorded of Peter's words in Acts.

The issue of authorship remains open and contested, but we can safely conclude that the author is either Peter himself or someone from his close circle of disciples in Rome writing in his name shortly after his death. While I recognize the force of some of the arguments against Peter's direct authorship, I believe the stronger case still remains for Peter as author, and I will assume his authorship in the course of the commentary. Whether or not Peter is the author, 1 Peter remains an †inspired and †canonical book of the Bible.

The Recipients of the Letter

The recipients of this letter are Christians resident in five Roman provinces of Asia Minor: Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (see the map on p. 27). The order in which the five provinces are listed possibly reflects the

10. Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude*, 2.

11. Jobes, *1 Peter*, "Excursus: The Syntax of 1 Peter: How Good Is the Greek?" 325–38.

12. Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 37, and Jobes, *1 Peter*, 11, argue that the church structure evident in 1 Peter actually points to a more primitive era of the Church.

circular travel route that would have been taken by the bearer of the letter, who would have delivered it to each province in turn.¹³

Given Peter's emphasis on suffering throughout the letter, it is evident that the Christians he is writing to are experiencing trials and persecutions. It is possible that these Christians were undergoing formal trials in Roman courts, but it seems more likely that Peter is referring to the ongoing, daily abuse and criticism that Christians were receiving from their pagan neighbors.

What is the identity of the audience Peter is writing to? Are they Jews, †Gentiles, or a mixture of both? Peter's use of the term "†dispersion" (1:1) led some early Christian commentators to conclude that the audience was mainly Jewish, given that "dispersion" was used as a technical term to designate the Jewish community outside Palestine. In addition, the audience is told to "maintain good conduct among the Gentiles" (2:12) and to cease behaving like the Gentiles do (4:3). This would naturally indicate that the audience was Jewish. However, there are even stronger indications that the audience was composed mainly of Gentiles. Peter speaks about their "former ignorance" (1:14) and the futile life inherited from their ancestors (1:18). He identifies them as coming out of darkness (2:9) and having been "no people" (2:10) before their new birth in Christ. All of these designations apply to Gentiles much more readily than to Jews. While it is probable that there were both Gentiles and Jews in these churches, Peter seems to be addressing a largely Gentile audience, called from the nations through Christ to the inheritance of Israel.

The Use of the Old Testament

First Peter makes abundant use of the Old Testament, with at least eighteen direct citations and twenty-five allusions. The references are predominately from four books—Genesis, Isaiah, Psalms, and Proverbs—and Peter normally makes use of the Greek version, the †Septuagint (LXX). We will pay special attention in the commentary to how Peter applies the Old Testament to the Christian community and the new way of life Christians are called to as God's household. Three Old Testament texts in particular play a central role in Peter's exhortation:

1. Exodus 19:5–6, for Christian identity as a royal priesthood and holy nation;

13. See Elliott, *1 Peter*, 91–93, for a detailed outline and map of this projected circular travel route through the five provinces.

2. Psalm 34, for a way of life marked by trusting in God, doing good, and avoiding evil;
3. Isaiah 53, for describing Christ's voluntary suffering and our imitation of him.

More than any other New Testament author, Peter develops his understanding of Christ from the texts of Isaiah on the †Suffering Servant.

Theological Themes

The first theme sounded by 1 Peter is resurrection, new life, and inexpressible joy through baptism into Christ (see 1:3–9). This theme is so predominant that some commentators have speculated that 1 Peter was originally written to accompany a baptismal liturgy.¹⁴ While this is unlikely, 1 Peter can be understood as a resurrection letter that resounds with the joy of the new life we now have through our baptism into Christ.

This initial joyful theme is moderated by a second theme, the call to sobriety and holiness. As resident aliens and sojourners on earth (see 1:13–17), Christians are called to live good and upright lives in the midst of non-Christians (see 2:11–12). The climax of the call to holiness is an invitation to share in the suffering of Christ. By circling back to this theme again and again, Peter makes clear that readiness to suffer in imitation of Christ is at the heart of his message. It is striking that Peter, who for a time resolutely resisted Jesus' own path to suffering (Mark 8:31–32), should emphasize the call to suffer for the sake of Christ more than any other author in the New Testament.

A third theme, the exhortation to “do good” and “avoid evil,” predominates especially in chapters 2–4. Though easily underestimated, this theme is marked by a wide and original vocabulary. For Peter, a crucial part of living as a Christian in pagan society is the visibility of our good life and actions. By doing good and avoiding evil we give effective witness to Christ.

An important image for 1 Peter is the Church as the temple and house of God (see 2:4–10). As we shall see in greater detail in the commentary, Peter not only employs the image of “house” or “household” to portray the Church's spiritual identity, but also uses words related to “house” to describe relationships in the Christian community.¹⁵

14. For example, F. L. Cross, *1 Peter: A Paschal Liturgy* (London: Mowbray, 1954).

15. Elliott, *1 Peter*, 113, proposes “the household of God” as the root metaphor and organizing ecclesial image in 1 Peter.

Israel and the Church

Many commentators have concluded that, for Peter, the Church replaces Israel as the new people of God.¹⁶ They hold that Peter maintains what is called a †supersessionist account of the relationship between Israel and the Church, whereby the Church simply replaces Israel in the plan and purpose of God. But it is not clear that Peter views the relationship this way. Strikingly, he never addresses the issue of Jews and Gentiles, as Paul frequently does, but simply applies the call and privileges of Israel to the Church. While this *may* be a supersessionist reading on Peter's part, given the lack of evidence I believe it is better to interpret Peter as teaching the *continuation* of the promises to Israel in the Church (composed of both Jew and Gentile) and to leave open the question of how he views the status of Israel as a distinct people.

Language and Structure

Scholars have debated the quality and elegance of the Greek style in 1 Peter,¹⁷ but there can be no doubt that 1 Peter gives us a fresh and unique account of the gospel and the Christian life. In just over a hundred verses, we find sixty words that are used nowhere else in the New Testament, and a further seventy-four that are found only once outside of 1 Peter.¹⁸ The presence of so many unique or rare terms characterizes an author who is confidently proclaiming Christ in his own words, not one who is trying to imitate the style of another.

Though 1 Peter is not a tightly ordered letter, the basic structure is clear. Following the opening greeting (1:1–2), the first part of the letter (1:3–2:10) proclaims who we are in Christ as God's holy people. The second part of the letter (2:11–5:11) is mostly exhortation about how Christians are to live. But Peter is not just moralizing about doing good and avoiding evil. He is grounding our new way of life in the new birth we have received in Christ as members of God's household.

16. See Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 70; Senior, *1 Peter*, 12; Elliott, *1 Peter*, 113. However, J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, WBC (Waco: Word, 1988), liv–lv, maintains that 1 Peter should not be read in a supersessionist way.

17. Elliott, *1 Peter*, 64, describes 1 Peter as “relatively polished Greek,” while J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude* (London: A&C Black, 1969), 31, claims that its Greek is “unimaginative, monotonous and at times clumsy.” Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 2, says that the Greek of 1 Peter “belongs stylistically with the best prose of the NT,” but that “the quality of its Greek ought nevertheless not be exaggerated.” On the basis of her study of the language of 1 Peter, Jobs, *1 Peter*, 337, concludes that “the Greek of 1 Peter indicates an author whose first language was not Greek.”

18. See Elliott, *1 Peter*, 41–64, for an exhaustive list of 1 Peter's vocabulary.

The image of God's "house" or "household," when integrated with the related images of God's "nation" and "people," helps to unite the parts of the letter.¹⁹ The opening proclamation of the gospel (the kerygma) reaches its climax with the announcement that we are God's temple, house, nation, and people (2:5–10). Then the teaching (didache) of how we are to live as God's people and household follows. Peter describes quite practically what it means to be God's holy people and to live as God's household. In other words, the structure of the letter shows us that our *spiritual* identity as God's people and household in Christ has *practical* consequences for how we live.

Interpreting and Applying 1 Peter for Today

Peter originally wrote this letter to a set of churches in Asia Minor in the first century. Their world passed away long ago. How does this bright yet sober letter apply to us in the twenty-first century? How can we read it as the living Word of God that continues to speak to us today? I propose that in the task of interpreting and applying 1 Peter for today, we can distinguish four categories of texts.

The first category is composed of familiar passages that we find relatively easy to understand and apply. Among these are the proclamation of new birth into a living hope (1:3–9), of our identity as a holy nation and royal priesthood (2:9–10), and of "the God of all [†]grace" who will "restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish" those who have suffered for the gospel (5:10). The challenge we face here is to go beneath the surface of these texts, deepening our understanding of their Old Testament context and penetrating what they mean for us in Christ.

A second category is composed of passages that are relatively clear but hard to embrace because they present the high calling of the cross. We find it hard to accept that we are "exiles and sojourners" in this world (2:11). When Peter tells us we should not be surprised by the fiery ordeal that descends on us, but rather rejoice that we get to suffer along with Christ (4:12–13), we may tend to shrink away. We need faith and courage to hear and respond to a word that cuts against the grain of contemporary views on happiness and the desire to live a life of comfort and ease.

The third category is composed of passages that present a view of relationships foreign to our modern societies and values. Peter consistently calls those in the Christian community to "be subject" or "be subordinate" to those in

19. The Greek word "house" or "household" (*oikos*) appears just twice in the letter (2:5; 4:17), but Peter's use of related words that are built from the root, *oikos*, suggests that the Church as God's "house" is an important unifying theme in 1 Peter: "slaves" (*oiketēs*, 2:18); "stewards" (*oikonomoi*, 4:10); "to build" (*oikodomēō*, 2:5, 7).

some kind of authority (2:13–20; 3:1–7; 5:1–5). In part, our society has changed dramatically from the first century and we need to read and apply these texts for our own time, with the benefit of twenty centuries of the Church's wisdom. At the same time, we need to allow ourselves to be challenged by these texts *precisely* because they present a mind-set so different than our own. Rather than dismissing them as outdated, we should ask how we can apply them in a way fitting for our day, so that the whole counsel of Scripture has its place in our lives.

Finally, there are obscure texts in 1 Peter. Who are the “spirits in prison” that Christ preached to after his death (3:19–20)? What does Peter mean when he says that those who have suffered in the [†]flesh have ceased from sin (4:1)? While doing our best to understand these passages, we need humility in the face of their obscurity, recognizing that we may not be able to reach a definitive interpretation. The traditional rule for biblical interpretation applies here: interpret the more difficult and obscure passages by those that are clear and more evident, within the context of the living tradition of the Church.

First Peter has much to say to our generation. Like the Christians of the first century, we too need to recapture our identity as God's household and embark on a way of life distinct from those around us (1:14). We too are called to live justly and be examples to those around us, so that they may respond more readily to the gospel (2:12). We too need to be ready to give an account of the hope within us with gentleness and reverence (3:15). And we too live in an age when many Christians are called to suffer for their faith without reviling or giving abuse in return (2:23). Filled with passages that inspire, challenge, and even perplex us, 1 Peter is very much a word for our day.

Outline of 1 Peter

Address and Greeting (1:1–2)

Part One: Who We Are as God's People and Household (1:3–2:10)

A. Opening Blessing and Proclamation (1:3–12)

New Birth into a Living Hope (1:3–9)

The Prophets Fulfilled in the Gospel (1:10–12)

B. New Way of Life in God's Household (1:13–2:10)

Call to Holiness in Conduct (1:13–21)

Call to Love the Brothers and Sisters (1:22–25)

Call to Be God's Household, Priesthood, and People (2:1–10)

Part Two: How We Are to Live as God's People and Household (2:11–5:11)

A. Order in Relationships (2:11–3:12)

General Exhortation to Good Conduct (2:11–12)

Secular Authorities (2:13–17)

Household Servants (2:18–25)

Wives and Husbands (3:1–7)

Exhortation to Unity, Love, and Humility (3:8–12)

B. Faithfulness in Suffering for Christ (3:13–4:19)

Suffering and Witness in Imitation of Christ (3:13–17)

Christ's Victory through Suffering (3:18–22)

Suffering and Doing the Will of God (4:1–6)

Love, Hospitality, and Service in God's Household (4:7–11)

Reprise: Sharing in the Sufferings of Christ (4:12–19)

C. Concluding Exhortations (5:1–11)

Exhortation to Elders and Younger People (5:1–5a)

Exhortation to All: Humility before Each Other and God
(5:5b–11)

Final Greeting (5:12–14)