

## Lesson Two — An Initial Glimpse

*Day One — To Whom did Peter Write?*

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Last week we came to know the man, Peter, a little better. We watched the Lord call him and change his name from Simon to Peter; we learned of his strengths and weaknesses, his successes and failures. We heard him deny the Lord, weep bitter tears, then saw him swim to shore to meet Jesus in humble repentance. The only portion of that conversation we are privy to is the Lord asking Peter if he loved Him. Peter was wary of admitting unconditional love, but the Lord knew how He would strengthen Peter, and commanded him to feed His sheep.

As Peter took this command seriously, his life dramatically changed. He was the first to speak on the Day of Pentecost. Later, he was jailed, released, and reckoned it a blessing to be counted worthy to suffer for Christ. He was central in the activity of the early church in and around Jerusalem (Acts 2-10). After Paul's conversion (Acts 9), and especially after the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), little is known of Peter's activities. Paul comes front and center in Biblically recorded activity. But here at the end of Peter's life, he writes these two epistles, addressed to a group of people with whom Paul had had much to do.

Nearly 30 years had passed since that first Pentecost following Christ's death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. The Church had come to need preparation for the apparent, imminent persecution of Nero. The rule of Rome was still strong, and increasingly at odds with Christians. Nero was a tyrant, and under his rule, many Christians were brutally martyred. Paul had been imprisoned in Rome once and would yet be again. Things began to look imminent, even for Paul and Peter personally.

Peter's first epistle was for the purpose of strengthening those in Asia who were beginning to feel the heat of Nero's hatred. It is believed that this epistle was probably written around 64 AD. Peter desired the believers in Asia to come to grips with the claims concerning their inheritance about which they had already been taught, and to persevere in *the faith*, with that perseverance bringing faith to its desired goal, the salvation of the soul (I Pe. 1:9).

This week we are going to do two things. First we will study the historical setting of these two epistles. It will be very helpful for us to understand the ministry which had taken place in this region prior to Peter's

writing so that we can gain better insight into Peter's intent. Then we will gain an overview of the contents of his letters with emphasis, right now, on the first letter. With that in mind, let's get started. Please pray for your grasp of Peter's intent.

## Day One — To Whom did Peter Write?

Today and tomorrow we will look at the recipients of this letter. Read Peter's address below:

### I Peter 1

**1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia...**

If you have maps in your Bible, find the one that shows the names of the regions during Paul's day, and look at the area directly south of the Black Sea. Do you find these regions?

It will be helpful to get to know the background of the people who lived in this region, in order to ascertain their spiritual condition, if we are able, to see what level of spiritual understanding they may have had prior to receiving this first letter from Peter. The reason why this will be helpful is because we will be able to better understand Peter's intent in his letters. If we gain insight into the background of the people who are recipients of this (or any) epistle, it will better enable us to understand the intent of the author and come to a more correct interpretation. For example, does it appear that much evangelizing had taken place in that region? Were the people taught in the elementary things of Scripture? Had they been taught in the meat of the Word? Did an apostle remain there for any length of time doing ministry? Were certain people of the area well trained to teach others? Etc., etc.

If the Scriptures provide these answers for us, then we will certainly be better equipped to understand a letter going into that region. And the Scriptures certainly do give us answers to these questions. Let's look at them and see.

Let's go back to the first Pentecost after Christ's death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. Jews from this region (hereafter we will refer to this region generically as Asia — the region wherein Peter addresses his letters) were present in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:9). In fact, Jews from all over the known world made the journey to Jerusalem in the springtime of each year, as it was required of them to be present in Jerusalem for the spring feast days. Many would stay for the 50+ days beginning with Unleavened Bread, (a seven day period beginning with and following Passover) until the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost (fifty days after Firstfruits). These Jews from the surrounding regions would often remain in Jerusalem for the entire period of time, rather than traveling back and forth.

Some of the recipients of Peter's letters could have conceivably been some of the Jews from Pontus, Cappadocia, and Asia who were in Jerusalem on the Passover (the day Christ was crucified), and then remained in Jerusalem the 50+ days up to and including Pentecost. It was this Pentecost when Peter gave the message recorded in Acts chapter two. And it is an interesting thought to ponder, that people from Asia were present to see the things transpiring in Acts 2 and to hear Peter's message. (The early Jewish historian, Josephus, believes that there may have been 2,000,000 Jews in the city for these Feast days in any given year.) And many of those present at the place where the Holy Spirit filled the disciples, and empowered Peter to give this first message, were *pierced to the heart, repented, and were baptized*, and *three thousand souls (lives) were saved* (<4982> *sozo* — delivered [Acts 2:40,47]) *that very day*.

4982 *sozo* — from a primary *sos* (contraction for obsolete *saos*, "safe"); to save, i.e. deliver or protect (literally or figuratively): — heal, preserve, save (self), do well, be (make) whole.

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At any rate, this is a region which was home to many Jews. In Acts 16, the beginning of Paul's second journey, Paul and Silas desired to go to Asia to teach, but were forbidden by the Holy Spirit, and were instead directed to go to Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10). (If your map identifies these areas you may want to check it out.) The reason for His forbidding them is not mentioned. It is obvious, however, that the gospel was later preached to the people of this region (Jews and Gentiles alike). We see on Paul's third journey, he remained in this area for a period of up to three years. Acts chapters eighteen and nineteen detail the account.

In Acts chapter eighteen, we see Paul leaving Athens and going into Corinth. This is when and where he meets a Christian couple named Aquila and Priscilla. (Interestingly enough, Aquila is a native from Pontus one of the regions in Asia [18:2].) After staying in Corinth for a time, Paul left to go to Syria taking Aquila and Priscilla with him. But when they came to Ephesus, a thriving port city on the southwestern edge of Asia, Paul left Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus, while he traveled on to Caesarea, Antioch, and then later, on to the regions of Galatia and Phrygia, for the purpose of strengthening the disciples there (18:21-23). (Ephesus, Galatia and Phrygia are regions in Asia.)

Remember that Ephesus was a port city for this region, as it lay on the southwest edge of the region, on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. While Aquila and Priscilla were ministering there, they met a Bible teacher named Apollos, who was from Alexandria. Luke says of Apollos, that he was a very powerful Bible teacher, yet Aquila and Priscilla had to take him aside and explain to him the way of God more accurately. Evidently he accepted the truth they had imparted to him and desired to go and teach in the region of Achaia, which is where Corinth is located.

Acts chapter nineteen opens with Apollos having gone to Corinth while Paul makes his way back to Ephesus through Caesarea, then to Antioch and up through the "upper country" — the regions just south of the Black Sea. This is the exact areas which are addressed in Peter's letters. This is often referred to as the beginning of Paul's third journey, which was around 52 AD. This is where it gets interesting for us as we study the region addressed by Peter in his letters. Pay attention to the ministry done in this region.

In coming back to Ephesus, Paul found some disciples there. He continued to speak boldly in the synagogue for about three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. When the Jews rejected the message, Paul moved his daily meeting place somewhere else. Let's look to see what he was speaking to them about...

### Acts 19

**8 And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. 9 But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the multitude, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. 10 And this took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.**

What was the subject of his messages (v. 8)?

What happened?

Write verse ten in your own words:

As we will see later, Paul ended up in this region for up to three years. He not only taught in Ephesus, but made his way through the entire region. The remaining portion of Acts 19 reveals more of the detail of Paul's ministry there. The Lord performed numerous and powerful miracles through the hand of Paul, and he became very well known throughout the region.

**Acts 19:20 So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.**

**Acts 19: 26a "...And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people..."**

Following these events, Paul moves on. He again travels through Macedonia, Greece, Philippi, and Troas, before deciding to make his way back to Jerusalem. Heading back toward Jerusalem, and passing through several cities, Paul decides not to spend time in Asia, because he wants to get to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. So rather than stopping in Ephesus, he passes by and stops in the neighboring town of Miletus. There he calls the elders of Ephesus to him. He delivers a powerful message to the elders of Ephesus, as he knows he faces bonds in Jerusalem. Yet he is determined to go.

In case we missed the point that Paul had taught the people of the region of Asia well, the Holy Spirit makes sure we have another chance to understand that the people of this region had been well taught in the Word of the Lord, even concerning the Kingdom. Here in Miletus (Acts 20), Paul delivers what could be his final personal message to those in Ephesus, this port city of Asia. What he told these elders from Ephesus is astounding. And it has very much to do with understanding Peter's letters, especially his second one. We'll see it tomorrow.

We have covered enough material today. We will pick it up at Acts 20 tomorrow.

## **Day Two — A Glimpse at Paul's Ministry in the Region**

Yesterday we looked at the ministry which had been taking place in Asia through the Apostle Paul and his disciples. Today we will look at this ministry in a nutshell, even as Paul saw it. Paul left Asia after spending nearly three years there, and worked his way up into Corinth and Philippi, then made his way back toward Jerusalem. He stopped in Miletus and called the elders of Ephesus together for a final message to them. Prior to this, the Holy Spirit had been impressing upon Paul that afflictions and bondage faced him in Jerusalem, something which did not deter Paul from the work the Lord had called him to. With that in mind, he makes this final personal exhortation to the elders from Ephesus.

### **Acts 20**

**17 And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. 18 And when they had come to him, he said to them, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, 19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; 20 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, 21 solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. 22 And now, behold, bound in spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. 24 But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. 25 And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will see my face no more. 26 Therefore I**

testify to you this day, that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. 28 Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. 32 And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. 33 I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. 34 You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. 35 In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

36 And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. 37 And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, 38 grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they should see his face no more. And they were accompanying him to the ship.

What location is Paul referring to as he explains this part of his ministry (v. 18)?

What were the topics with which Paul was dealing while spending these three years in Asia (v.20, 21, 24, 5, 27)?

In a nutshell, what did Paul teach?

What was his warning in verses 28-31?

From where would these false teachers come? (Make sure you don't miss this point, otherwise you may have problems in understanding some of II Peter.)

Write out verse thirty-two in your own words:

After Paul made his farewells, he took his leave and went straight to Jerusalem. As the Holy Spirit had impressed him, Paul was brought into captivity. (Interestingly enough, it was a ruckus caused by some Jews from Asia [21:27].) The Jews laid hands on Paul (abt. 56 AD), and through certain and extended circumstances, Paul was eventually taken to Rome and imprisoned there (60-62 AD). During his confinement, he wrote at least four epistles, one of which was to the Ephesians. (Knowing all of this background should help in understanding Paul's intent to the people of Ephesus, as he wrote this letter.) He was later released (abt. 62AD), and began traveling again. Shortly thereafter, while staying in Macedonia, he wrote his first letter to Timothy. And guess where Timothy was when Paul wrote to him?

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You may have guessed it — Timothy was ministering in Ephesus because Paul had left him there to minister to those in Asia.

Do you see the heart Paul had for the people in this region? And they had no small understanding *of the whole counsel of God's Word* either. In fact, read what Paul's opening words were to Timothy in this first letter to Timothy:

### **I Timothy 1**

**1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior, and of Christ Jesus, who is our hope; 2 to Timothy, true child in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. 3 As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus, in order that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, 4 nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith.**

**5 But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. 6 For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, 7 wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions.**

What was Paul's concern in vv. 3, 4, 6, 7?

Now things were beginning to really heat up for the Christians. Nero, the Emperor of Rome, hated Christians. Many Christians were being persecuted and martyred for their faith. Now it was only a matter of time before the heavy hand of this persecution moved eastward toward Asia. And while Peter's letter mostly dealt with the suffering which those in Asia imminently faced through this persecution, Paul seemed more concerned about the falling away from the faith brought about, not at the hands of persecutors, but rather at the hands of false teachers.

From what Paul writes to Timothy, and from what he said to the elders of Ephesus at Miletus, can you see his obvious concern has to do with the false teachers? He was concerned that many in Asia would be led away from the truth which Paul had so rigorously taught.

Now here is the question...having seen all the ministry that went into this region at Paul's own hand, and subsequently following that, Timothy's work there, what type of letter do you think Peter may have needed to write to these people, here on the eve of great persecution? Do you think it might be a letter of "how to become saved," or a letter having to do with things beyond the simple message of salvation, things having to do with endurance, having a goal in mind? Record your thoughts.

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It might be good for you to keep these things in mind as you study through these two letters written by Peter to the people of the region of Asia.

See you tomorrow.

### Day Three — An Overview of I Peter

We need to spend the time today reading over the complete letter of I Peter. Please take the time to do that now. Use the worksheets of I Peter in the Appendix to do your reading, but do not take any notes today. Just read straight through the letter trying to get a general feeling of what it is about. Pray first, asking God to give you understanding of this epistle. And keep in mind what you have learned about the historical setting of this letter.

When you have completed your first reading, write down any observations you may have.

### Day Four — A Second Look

Today we will do the same thing as yesterday — read through I Peter completely, only this time feel free to begin marking your observation sheets as you read. Look for repeated phrases or thoughts. Make notes in your margins that will help you continue to study through these chapters in the upcoming weeks.

And may I say something about reading and rereading texts of the Bible? (I have you do it frequently!) At first, this type of study (reading and rereading straight Bible texts) may seem somewhat redundant. But it is *the most useful and powerful tool we have in correctly dividing God's Word*. I am continuously amazed (and I mean *continuously*) at how much I learn by simply reading a text over and over again. The more familiar one becomes with the text, the more the Holy Spirit has to work with in us to draw things together; to open our eyes to His intent; to give us discernment and understanding. And it must be so, because these are the *only words* which are *alive and sharp*. All of man's words, every one of them, fall far short of God's Word. Actually, there is no comparison — God's Word vs. Man's word. One is alive and active and sharper than any two-edged sword. The other is not. So the more you spend time reading or hearing God's word, the better equipped you are to interpret it correctly. Having said that, will you do the rereading now?

Anything pop out at you today?

As you close your study, ask the Holy Spirit to remind you of the things in I Peter, and to teach you while you meditate on this Word throughout your day.

### Day Five — A Glimpse at II Peter

This week we have learned quite a bit. We have learned about the historical setting of the people in the region to whom Peter address both of his letters. We have seen how Paul's focus of ministry was in this region prior to his imprisonment, and how Paul warned them about false teachers.

Peter's focus in his first letter seems to be a little different. Peter's focus was on the potential suffering which they faced at the hands of Nero, though it isn't exactly spelled out in so many words. Only history reveals that this first letter preceded great persecution. And while the Holy Spirit penned the words of warning and encouragement through Peter's pen in this first letter, the Holy Spirit did confirm Paul's concern about false teachers through Peter's second letter. And ultimately, it was the false teachers who brought the church down in Asia. There was a great apostasy which took place in Asia. Sad to say, in Paul's second letter to Timothy, he states *that all in Asia had left him*. Note Paul's exhortation to Timothy:

#### II Timothy 1

**13 Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 14 Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.**

And the statement which follows his exhortation:

**15 You are aware of the fact that all who are in Asia turned away from me...**

Reflect on the conditions of the Church at large today. Do you see anything similar to the statement Paul makes here? If so, what is similar, and how should you handle it?

For the remainder of our time today we are going to read through Peter's second letter. Read it now from your sheets in your Appendix.

Did you notice what Peter said about Paul's letters in the end of this second letter? If you missed it, go back and notice 3:14-16.

I'll see you in class.