Some Problems of First Peter

Robert E. Boyette

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/grtheses

Part of the Biblical Studies Commons, Christianity Commons, and the History of Christianity Commons

Recommended Citation
Name of candidate:

Robert Earl Bovette

Oral examination:

Date May 6, 1958

Committee:

S. Marion Smith, Chairman
James Clague
George Stuart

Thesis title:

Some Problems of First Peter

Thesis approved in final form:

Date May 6, 1958

Major Professor S. Marion Smith
SOME PROBLEMS OF FIRST PETER

BY

ROBERT E. BOYETTE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts Department of New Testament

Division of Graduate Instruction
Butler University
Indianapolis, Indiana
June, 1958
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. THE PROBLEM OF AUTHORSHIP - TRADITIONAL VIEW.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. THE PROBLEM OF AUTHORSHIP - NON-TRADITIONAL VIEW</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. THE PROBLEM OF THE SPIRITS IN PRISON</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. THE PROBLEM OF PERSECUTION</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

This study is an introduction to some of the problems found in First Peter.

The first chapter will be devoted to the presentation of the traditional view of authorship. Does the epistle come to us with the authority of the chief of the apostles? Tradition says yes.

The second chapter questions the traditional view. Some scholars have questioned or rejected the verdict of tradition.

In the third chapter the problem of the spirits in prison will be considered. Scholars disagree relative to this interpretation. What is meant by preaching to the spirits in prison? Who are these spirits? What does preaching to the dead mean?

The fourth chapter deals with the problem of persecution. Was this a definite persecution or only unfriendliness from their communities? Was the persecution in progress or only imminent? In whose reign did this persecution come; Nero, Domitian, or Trajan?
twelves parallelisms and Harnack twenty) Barnabas and Hermas also seem to have known First Peter.

(b) Polycarp, who died A. D. 155, is steeped in the language of First Peter.

(c) Irenaeus, who wrote A. D. 185, testifies, Peter says in his epistle, "whom though you see him not, etc."

The absence of any reference to First Peter in the Muratorian canon is probably due to the fragmentariness of the document, clearly the epistle was reckoned canonical from the time when the word "canonical" began to have any meaning. In the words of "The Thirty Nine Articles," it is one of the books "of whose authority there never was any doubt in the church." And the church's unanimity about its authority is very hard to explain unless its claim to Petrine authorship be really true.1

Selwyn writes that, "when all due weight has been given to the work of Silvanus it still remains true that the governing mind and character in First Peter are those of the apostle himself."2

Selwyn states also that First Peter does undoubtedly reflect "the tradition and teaching of the primitive church with a sympathy and sensitiveness unequalled in any other epistle. Yet for all that it is not anonymous, but rightly bears the name of First Peter."3 Selwyn states further:

The view that Silvanus drafted the epistle and in doing so used material of various kinds which was already familiar to his readers and listeners accords well with the internal evidence of the letter itself and with what we know of Silvanus

1Ibid, pp., 77-78.
3Ibid, p. 32.
from other sources; but it still leaves much to be said as to the question of authorship - a question forced on us both by the explicit works of the salutation and by the interpretation of the epistle itself. The question still remains, in what sense was St. Peter the author? The clue to the answer lies in the salutation: the author wrote as "an apostle of Jesus Christ." That was his authority for writing: he wrote as an apostle, and it was apostolic authority that was needed by the churches whom he addressed and in the time of trial in which he addressed them. In 5:12 he insists that it is he who writes "through Silvanus," thus renewing the apostolic claim of the salutation.

The testimony of antiquity is unanimous in accepting this epistle as a genuine work of "Peter an apostle of Jesus Christ." "It is only in modern times that doubts as to its genuineness have been suggested." 2

Eusebius states that only one of the Petrine epistles is recognized as genuine and acknowledged by the elders of olden time. He declares that, "of all the writings under the name of Peter he recognized only one epistle as genuine-First Peter." 3 Cranfield says, "the actual arguments against the traditional authorship are not nearly as strong as has been made out." 4

Cranfield continues stating that:

For anyone reading the letter in the original language the most obvious difficulties in the way of accepting the Petrine authorship are the good greek style and

1 Ibid, p. 28.
the extensive literary vocabulary. Is it likely, it is asked, that a Galilean fisherman, who at the beginning of the apostolic mission could be described as "unlearned and ignorant" (Acts 4:13) and for whom Greek was a foreign tongue, would ever have written some of the best Greek in the New Testament? But this difficulty disappears at once, if we attribute to Silvanus (mentioned in 5:12 as Peter's amanuensis) a rather more responsible share in the composition of the letter than that of a mere scribe writing to dictation. It is reasonable to attribute to him the refinements of Greek grammar and style and the literary vocabulary, while at the same time, recognizing in the letter the message, personality and apostolic authority of Peter.

The position then seems to be that, provided we allow for Silvanus having been rather more than a mere amanuensis, there is no sufficient reason for denying the traditional authorship of First Peter.1

Cash, believing in the Petrine authorship of First Peter, states that, "St. Peter, with the help of Silvanus, writes this epistle shortly after St. Paul's death."2 He says, "on the one hand he writes as an eyewitness of Christ's suffering, on the other, as one who had lived with him."3

Bacon states that First Peter is unique. "The name of Peter belongs to First Peter in its own right."4

Hort writes that ancient tradition uniformly attributes the epistle to St. Peter saying:

This epistle shares with First John the preeminence of being to all appearances universally accepted from the time when any book of the New Testament

---

1 Ibid, p. 9.


3 Ibid, p. 25.

other than the Gospels and St. Paul's epistles had canonical authority.¹

Dods likewise confirms that the epistle was universally accepted as genuine by the early church and the epistle claims to be from the hand of the apostle Peter. He also mentions the early church fathers mentioning it. Eusebius mentions it among the undisputed books of the New Testament. He states that, "it was freely used by Polycarp, and echoes of it are heard in the epistle to Diognetus. Papias also used it, and by Irenaeus and Tertullian it was undoubtedly accepted."²

Robertson states that, "the epistle is not anonymous, but claims to be written by 'Peter', an apostle of Jesus Christ. (1:1), that is Cephas (Simon Peter)."³

He continues saying:

If this statement is not true, that it was written by Peter, then the book is pseudonymous by a late writer who assumed Peter's name, but he says, "there is no book in the New Testament which has earlier, better or stronger attestation, though Irenaeus is the first to quote it by name." Eusebius places it among the acknowledged books, those accepted with no doubt at all. We here assume that Simon Peter wrote this epistle or at any rate dictated it by an amanuensis as Paul did in Romans (16:22).⁴

⁴Ibid, p. 71.
Peake states:

The epistle claims in the salutation to be the work of Peter, and this claim is fully attested by external evidence. It was known to the author of the Second Epistle of Peter and to Polycarp and to the author of the Teaching of The Twelve Apostles.1

Eusebius states it was also known to Papias. It was not mentioned in the Muratorian canon, but Eusebius includes it among the accepted epistles. Peake also says that, "it was quoted as Peter's by Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian and Origen."2

Kerr writes freely stating his belief about Petrine authorship giving first the external evidence:

We find an undeniable reference to it in Second Peter 3:1. Clement of Rome (96) repeatedly quotes its language, and the same is true to a certain extent of Polycarp (116) and of the Epistle to Diognetus (117). The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarch (120) also doubtless uses it. Papias (120-130) and Hermas (130-150) made use of it. To these witnesses must also be added the names of Melito of Sardis (170), Theophilus of Antioch (168-182), and the Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne (177) certain heretical sects also of the first half of the second century, the Marcosians, the Simonians, and the Basilidians used it. This external testimony is so strong that Renan says, "this First Epistle of Peter is one of the writings of the New Testament which is most ancienly and unanimously cited as authentic."

The internal evidence of the book points in the same way. It was written before the destruction of the temple (4:17) and it is evident that it was addressed to those who were themselves converts to the Christian faith, and not the children of converts. The writer had seen Christ (5:1). The author of the epistle had as close acquain-
tances Mark and Silvanus, who are evidently the same


2Ibid, p. 71.
persons as those thus named in the Acts. Furthermore, the epistle makes an explicit claim to Petrine authorship. Weiss says, "we perceive that the author was actually one of the primitive apostles from the vividness with which the image of Christ's innocent and suffering life is before his mind. (2:21 ff; Cf 1:19; 3:18). No reasonable doubt can exist as to the apostle Peter's having been the actual author of this epistle."1

Salmon states, "after the Pauline epistle I take St. Peter's First Epistle, the only document among those ranked in the early church as uncontroverted."2

Eusebius, he says, included First Peter in his, "The Generally Accepted Books." He says the earliest attestation to Peter's First Epistle is that given in the Second (3:1). Those who do not claim this Second Epistle to be the work of Peter acknowledge that it is a very early document, and if it be a forgery, it is nevertheless clear that there was at the time when it was written, an epistle already in circulation, which the author believed to be Peter's, on the level of which he aspired to place the second letter.

"The external attestation to the epistle being so strong, I attribute no importance to the only point in which it is defective, that is, that the Muratorian fragment mentions neither epistle of Peter."3

Miller says that there seems to be no valid reason for questioning the authorship of this epistle, "for there is overwhelming evidence that it is the work of the apostle Peter. The unbroken tradition running back to apostolic times is that Peter wrote it."4 He continues:


2Salmon, George, An Historical Introduction To The Study Of The Books Of The New Testament, (London: John Murray, 1904),

3Ibid, p. 435.

Renan said it is "one of the writing of the New Testament which is most anciently and most unanimously cited as authentic." In fact the church fathers do not suggest any other author but Peter. Irenaeus, in quoting from Peter, prefices the quotation with the words "Peter says."

References within the letter itself point to Peter, such as the statement that he was a "witness of the sufferings of Christ." (5:1). "Gird yourselves with humility" (vs. 5, A.R.V.) is perhaps an allusion to the washing of the disciples' feet incident in the upper room, while "feed the flock of God" (vs 2) recalls the injunction Jesus gave Peter by the sea after his resurrection.

Some objections to Peter as the author have been based on the style of Greek. That such unusually good and idiomatic Greek does not fit the Galilean fisherman. But such an argument is hardly valid, for (5:12) suggests the possibility that Silvanus was the scribe and which might account for the style of Greek, while Peter's activities as an outstanding apostle might provide an explanation for the use of such good Greek.

Objection has been made that the background of the epistle is the persecution of the Christians, which was not until the time of Domitian, and after the death of Peter the apostle. It is true that there was no widespread and systematic persecution during the period when Paul and Peter were martyred under Nero, but the epistle itself does not indicate that Peter is talking about such persecutions. He urges the Christians to submit to the State, which would not have been the case if conditions existed such as those which produced the Book of Revelation under Domitian. Other objections have been raised but none of them serious enough to warrant rejecting Peter as the author. The positive evidence has been strong enough to influence even liberal scholars in favor of Peter as author.

Farrar says, "the genuineness of the book is proved alike by external and internal evidence. The epistle abounds in indications of genuineness which no forger could have imitated." He states further, "we see in this epistle the true Peter - a Peter who, though he is a chief apostle, is still the simple, warmhearted...

---

1 Ibid, pp. 284-5.
fisherman of the Galilean lake." He firmly believes that, "it was written in Rome, which he calls by its mystic name of Babylon, and he contends that the intense fury of the Neronian persecution did not last long." Farrar further believed that the apostle who had been so close an eye-witness of the sufferings of Christ and the glory which followed, "wrote to these persecuted communities a letter of which the central message is, submit and endure in cheerful innocence, for you are heirs of salvation."3

Linn writes that, "First Peter reflects Peter's personal character as given in other New Testament writings; it reflects a strong personal attachment to the Master, a vivacious and hopeful attitude."4 In the production of this epistle and being told that Peter was assisted by Silas or Silvanus, Linn says, "such assistance may have been the case in other apostolic writings and may serve as the key to the proper understanding of many linguistic problems."5

Hastings emphasizes and sums up by saying:

First Peter is, with the single exception of First John, the only one among the Catholic epistles whose authority was never in doubt in the church. No sooner did a theological literature spring up in the church than this epistle is quoted by name as the work of St. Peter. There is good reason for thinking that Papias

1 Ibid, p. 419.
2 Ibid, p. 421.
5 Ibid, p. 45.
referred to it explicitly as the epistle of St. Peter.\footnote{Hastings, James, A Dictionary Of The Bible, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), Vol. III, p. 781.}

He continues saying that, "the only natural interpretation of the facts - the early and wide influence of the epistle on the one hand,"\footnote{Ibid, p. 781.} "plus the consistent and unwavering attribution of it to St. Peter on the part of all writers from Irenaeus' time onward - is that from the first it was regarded as the work of that apostle."\footnote{Ibid, p. 781.}

Hunter also summing up says of the traditional authorship of First Peter:

We have surveyed both the external and the internal evidence. The general tone and temper of the epistle suggests that it comes down to us from the early days of the faith, nor can any of the objections raised against Petrine authorship be sustained.\footnote{Hunter, op. cit., p. 80.}

He concludes by saying, "we may therefore safely accept the tradition which links this epistle with the apostle Peter."\footnote{Ibid, p. 80.}

Zahn boldly says:

It is not Silvanus' letter, written merely at Peter's direction; for, from beginning to end, Peter is the one who speaks in the letter, without even formally mentioning Silvanus as a joint author, as Paul sometimes does. (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1).\footnote{Zahn, Theodor, Introduction To The New Testament, (Edinburgh: Tood T. Clark, 1909), p. 150.}
He also says, "it purports to be a letter of Peter's; and such it is, except that Peter left its composition to Silvanus."

Cartledge believes that certain hints in the epistle fit in well with the Petrine authorship, and his incidental references to the life of Jesus, would have been most natural for Peter. He writes:

In 5:1 he calls himself a "witness of the sufferings of Christ." In 5:13 he calls Mark his son; early tradition is unanimous that Mark was a close companion of Peter, so it is most natural for Peter to have spoken of him as his spiritual son. In 5:12, he calls his scribe Silvanus, "a faithful brother;" this may have been Paul's companion, who could have helped Peter, probably in Rome. 5:5 "gird yourselves with humility," may be an allusion to Jesus' washing the disciples' feet. 5:2 "feed the flock of God," reminds us of the incident by the Sea of Galilee in John 21.2.

He continues saying, "the positive evidence is strong and the negative weak, so most scholars, even radical ones, believe that the apostle Peter wrote the epistle. If he did not, no one knows who did."3

---

1 Ibid, p. 150.
3 Ibid, p. 165.
CHAPTER II

THE PROBLEM OF AUTHORSHIP - NON-TRADITIONAL VIEW

Living in an age of criticism which will accept little on mere authority, many modern scholars have rejected the testimony of tradition. Some challenge the Petrine authorship of First Peter on four various grounds. Hunter lists them:

(A) The letter shows a command of the Greek language incredible in a person like Peter.
(B) It is clearly indebted to Paulinism.
(C) It does not bear the mark of one who had known Jesus and heard his teaching.
(D) It implies a time when the mere profession of Christianity was a crime - that is, the first decade of the second century.

Chase says the chief objections to Petrine authorship are five in number.

(1) The reference to persecution are of such a kind as to imply a date which lies outside the probable, if not the possible, limits of St. Peter's life.
(2) St. Peter was a Jew of lowly origin and Papias speaks of Mark as his amanuensis. The epistle, on the other hand is written in good Greek.
(3) If the epistle was written from Rome, its silence about the death of St. Paul, if his martyrdom was recent, or if St. Paul was there at Rome, the absence of any message from him or news about him, is said to be inexplicable.
(4) It is alleged that we do not find in the epistle much which we should expect to find in a letter of St. Peter, the chief of the Lord's personal followers, that it shows no sign of a vivid remembrance either of Christ's life or of his teaching.
(5) The objection against the Petrine authorship of First Peter on which recent critics have laid most stress is its affinity in doctrine, thought and language with

1Hunter, op. cit., p. 78.
the Pauline Epistles.¹

Robinson believes that there are two difficulties with the view that Peter was the author of the epistle. "Peter probably died in the time of Nero, about 64 A.D. But there was no official persecution of Christians in Asia Minor until the time of Domitian in the last decade of the first century."² "The epistle is written in a very pure and fine Greek style. It is not easy to think of the Galilean fisherman becoming a master of a language which was not his mother tongue."³

Barnett states the objections to Petrine authorship are mainly as follows:

Harnack rejects it partly on the grounds that no writer before Irenaeus (c. 180) names St. Peter as the author. But feeling the difficulties of the pseudonymous theory he suggests that the body of the epistle (1:3-5, 11) was written by some Christian teacher at Rome. (McGiffert, who agrees with him, suggests Barnabas), between 83 and 93, or possibly earlier; and despite the absence of textual evidence for this view, the opening and closing sentences (1:1, 2 and 5:12-14) were added later, between 150 and 175; so that we have no means of knowing whether the main portion was originally an epistle or not.

A more serious objection arises in connexion with the style and language of the writing. The question arises whether a fisherman, brought up in bilingual Galilee, could or could not have gained, in the course of years, this command of the Greek language and knowledge of the Septuagint, although Aramaic was his native language.

A third objection of a different kind is drawn from the words of 4:16 "but if (anyone suffer) as a Christian let him not be ashamed but let him glorify God in this


³Ibid, p. 1339.
name." This is thought to mean that the readers in Asia Minor were suffering official persecution for the name "Christian," of which we do not possess actual evidence before the time of Trajan. His reply to Pliny's letter (A.D. 112) is the first imperial pronouncement known to us of Rome's attitude to Christianity; but it was clearly a pronouncement for the needs of the moment, and not an initiation of policy.

A fourth objection to the Petrine authorship of First Peter is based on the maturity of its doctrinal teaching, especially that on the descent into Hades, which seems akin to that of first century Christians.

Scott states the authorship of First Peter is more than doubtful on at least two grounds.

1. The epistle is written in excellent Greek, of which Peter, the Galilean, who for most of his life had never been outside of Palestine, would not have been capable.

2. A more serious argument can be based on the thought of the epistle, which is saturated with Pauline influence. The writer must not only have been acquainted with Paul's idea, but must have studied several of his epistles, the language of which he repeatedly borrows. How the letter came to be attributed to Peter, we do not know. Perhaps when it was first sent out, it bore some official title which was afterwards believed to designate Peter and was changed into his personal name. The attribution to Peter, must have been due to some misunderstanding, but how it arose we cannot now discover.

Hort says, "the first great persecution of which we have any direct account extant is that of Nero, which seems to have at least begun in 64 A.D. The next is that of Domitian a generation later, about 95 A.D." The third, he says, was in Bithynia under Trajan, as spoken of in Pliny's letter seventeen years later in 112 A.D. "If St. Peter be the author of this
Epistle, the persecution referred to must be the first, or be closely connected with the first."¹

Enslin states emphatically these words of objection to Petrine authorship by saying, "it is safe to say that were it not for the opening words, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the elect," Peter would never have been suggested as the author."²

Beare says there can be no possible doubt that Peter is a pseudonym. He writes, "there are strong reasons for dating the epistle in the reign of Trajan, and that in any case it must be later than the persecution of Nero, in which the apostle met his death."³ He believes that equally weighty arguments against the Petrine authorship are to be found in the language and style of the writer himself. He says finally, "it is certainly true that if the name "Peter" did not stand at the head of the epistle, it would never have occurred to anyone to suggest him as the author."⁴

The epistle is quite obviously the work of a man of letters, skilled in all the devices of rhetoric, and able to draw upon an extensive and even learned vocabulary. He is a stylist of no ordinary capacity, and he writes some of the best Greek in the whole New Testament, far smoother and more literary than that of the highly-trained Paul.

This is a feat plainly far beyond the powers of a Galilean fisherman, who at the time of the crucifixion, could neither read nor write even his own native tongue (aramaic). It is quite probable that there was some bilingualism in Galilee, and that a fisherman would be able to manage enough of the

¹ Ibid, p. 2.
⁴ Ibid, p. 25.
Greek of the market place to bargain for a good price for his fish, but that he should ever become a master of Greek prose is simply unthinkable. The case against the attribution to Peter is overwhelming. It has been shown that it could not possibly have been written during his lifetime, unless we reject the well-established tradition that he died in the Neronic persecution, and make him live on well into Flavian times. And such a letter could not have been written by him, the illiterate fisherman, if he had lived to be over a hundred.

The mention of Mark and Silvanus, and also of Babylon, has no significance except as part of the device of pseudonymity. With the definitive abandonment of the Petrine authorship, all reason for connecting the letter with a Roman author vanished. It seems probable, accordingly, that it was written in the area to which it was addressed, by a presbyter of the region, who knew at first hand the sufferings of his flock under the terror. But we have no means of penetrating behind pseudonym, and the true author remains hidden from us by the veil which he has himself chosen to draw.

Lake believes that the natural date for an authentic epistle of Peter referring to persecution, "would be in the days of the Persecution of Nero when tradition says that Peter was put to death (A.D. 64)." He says:

The really serious objection to the Neronic date is that there is no reason to suppose that the persecution in the time of Nero was anything except a local one in Rome. That it had spread to Pontius, Asia, Bithynia, Cappadocia and Galatia is an unwarranted assumption.

For this reason he continues:

It has often been suggested that the letter belongs to the beginning of the second century when, in the time of Trajan in the governorship of Pliny, we know that Christians were indicted "for the sake of the name."

---

1 Ibid., pp. 30-31.
3 Ibid, p. 166.
"And that to be, or to have been a Christian was regarded in Bithynia as a capital offense."  

He states further:

Of course, if this be so, the letter cannot have been written by Peter. As a third alternative, it was suggested by Ramsay and others that the letter belongs to the time of Domitian and that Peter may have escaped, in spite of the tradition, from being put to death under Nero. This is extremely improbable; the date under Domitian seems to combine all the difficulties of the other views. Moreover, there is very little real evidence that there was a persecution in the time of Domitian. It seems that the real choice is between accepting the Petrine authorship, thus ascribing the epistle to a date in the time of Nero, or putting it into the days of Trajan and Pliny. Of the two, we are inclined to accept the latter view as the more probable.

Maycock questions the traditional authorship of First Peter. He says, "I do not think that we can accept the traditional view of First Peter just as it stands."  

"First Peter is written in good Greek. This suggests that it could hardly have been written by a man, who, like the apostle Peter, had been a simple Galilean fisherman, and who was later referred to as "uneducated (Acts 4:13)."  

It, he believes, is difficult to think of Peter as the author of the letter in the sense that he wrote it with his own hand.

A possible answer would be Silvanus, who is referred to in 5:12 as the bearer of the letter. Or it might have been someone else who was closely connected with the church in Rome, and who brought the letter into its present form after Peter was dead.

---

1 Ibid., p. 166.  
2 Ibid., p. 167.  
4 Ibid., p. 90.  
5 Ibid., p. 90.
Most of those who have questioned the Petrine authorship have associated the epistle with Rome. Streeter emphasizes further difficulties:

We should not have expected Peter to call himself "a fellow elder," for apostle and elder were not the same; nor could Peter be accurately described as a "witness of the sufferings of Christ": he was not present at the crucifixion. "The epistle arose at a time when Christianity was a crime punishable by death." Would Peter, writing from Rome in that hour, have impressed upon his readers the duty of obedience to the imperial government, as a government which was sent by God "for vengeance on evil-doers and praise to those that do well: And would he have then called Rome "Babylon"? The epistle is not by the apostle, and does not emanate from Rome.

In the light of what has been written previously Heard speaks about Petrine authorship:

We know that at least three writings were in circulation in the second century which were falsely attributed to Peter, the epistle which is included in the New Testament as the Second Epistle of Peter, an Apocalypse of Peter, and a Gospel of Peter. Some features of this First Epistle too have led critics to regard it as also being a forgery, dating from the end of the first century or the very beginning of the second century.

The epistle is written in fluent and idiomatic greek, much better than that of Paul, and the Biblical quotations show an intimate knowledge of the Septuagint; this is hard to understand if the epistle is really the work of an aramaic speaking and illiterate fisherman. (Mt. 26:73, Acts 4:13).

There are numerous echoes of both the language and ideas of the Pauline epistles, notably of Romans, and some critics have interpreted the general theological tone of the epistle as reflecting a "central" churchmanship more compatible with a post-apostolic stage of development when Paul's epistles were more widely known, than with an earlier period. The references to persecution, especially the possibility of suffering as a

Christian (4:16), are sometimes taken to imply a date in the time of Trajan (A.D. 98-117) whose letters to Pliny (A.D. 112) furnish the first certain evidence that Christianity was regarded as of itself a crime against the state. It has been suggested, in pursuance of these arguments that the main part of the epistle (1-3-4;11) consists of a sermon to newly-baptized converts; this has been incorporated in a letter written to meet a crisis by a Christian who introduced Peter's name in an endeavour to give his words of exhortation an official and apostolic authority.  

Bigg, questioning Petrine authorship states, "it follows almost necessarily that St. Peter cannot have written the epistle himself." He says, "the apostle could not speak even his own native tongue with refined precision, but was easily recognized by dialect or accent as a Galilean (Matt. 26:73; Mark 14:70; Luke 22:59)." "He struck his own countrymen as an unlearned and ignorant man (Acts 4:13) and it is not probable that he acquired an easy master of Greek, for primitive tradition represents him as making use of Mark as an interpreter."  

Goodspeed is of the opinion that the authorship of First Peter belongs to a Christian elder of Rome. "Who he was it is not possible to say." He also states that:

---

3 Ibid, p. 5.  
In later times, when the name of Peter was being connected with the Roman Church, he naturally came to be considered the author of the great Christian letter, after Paul, that had gone out from Rome. Hebrews and First John do not name their writers, but the titles given these books in most Bibles ascribe them to definite authors, and something like this probably happened to First Peter, but, whoever wrote it, it gave the imperiled Christians all through Asia Minor a message of hope and courage during the persecution of Domitian.

Kretzmann boldly makes the statement that he "holds no brief for the traditional view, that he has no sympathy for its origin and later ramifications." Fowler indicates that the "authorship and date of the earlier and the longer of the two epistles having the name of Peter must be regarded as uncertain." That after Peter's name appears in the epistolary greeting at the opening, "there is nothing in the contents of the letter, or "homily", that directly indicates the authorship of the great apostle to the circumcision."

Rowlingson believes that there is great uncertainty regarding the authorship of the epistle. He says, "the traditional designation of Peter as author loses its face when we realize that several early writings were attributed to him in the second century which he obviously did not write."
McClure is of the opinion that the fiery trials and the author's exhortations to remain faithful refer to the persecution of Domitian over Asia Minor in the 90's, or to that of Trajan just after the first century. He writes, "it therefore is probably a pseudo-Petrine document, because Peter was now dead, and he knew no greek, oral or written." 1

---

CHAPTER III

THE PROBLEM OF THE SPIRITS IN PRISON

According to scholars the problem of the spirits in prison is such that few passages in the New Testament have exercised commentators more, and as a result no unanimity of opinion exists. It is termed by many scholars as one of the darkest and most difficult in the New Testament. The following are the passages:

For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit; in which he went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the Ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons were saved through water. For this is why the Gospel was preached even to the dead, that though judged in the flesh like men, they might live in the spirit like God. 

These are some of the problems involved:

1. What is meant by preaching to the spirits in prison?
2. Did Christ go in person - or did Christ go through Enoch or Noah?
3. Who are these spirits?
4. What does preaching to the dead mean?
5. Where was Christ's spirit in the interval between his death and resurrection?
6. What was to be the fate of those who had died before the Gospel was preached?

1First Peter 3:18-20, 4:6, (R. S. V.)
7. Did Christ descend into Hades?

Even though many scholars speak of these passages as the dark oracles of the New Testament, and the difficulty of its interpretation, many views have been given relative to its meaning.

The strength of the Enoch and Noah theories, which will be explained on the following pages, is to be found in Peter's way of thinking of Christ's speaking to various groups before his earthly birth - in his pre-existent state. Consider 1:10-11.

The prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired about this salvation; they inquired what person or time was indicated by the Spirit of Christ within them when predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory.

The author states it was Christ (his spirit) that indicated to the prophets relative to the future. Christ was considered alive and directing the prophets hundreds of years before his earthly birth.

Since the author thinks in the above mentioned channel may it not be that it was his Spirit speaking through Noah in his preaching, or through Enoch when he preached to the spirits in the underworld? If Christ spoke through the ancient prophets, why not through Noah or Enoch? Some scholars think this is really what Peter had in mind. Those who hold to the Noah and to the Enoch theory do not wish to believe

\[1^{\text{First Peter 1:10-11, (R. S. V.)}}\]
that Christ carried on a ministry while he was in the earth following his crucifixion.

1. **The Noah Theory**:

Vs. 18 For Christ also died -- being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit: vs. 19 in which spirit he went and preached to the spirits in prison: vs. 20 who formerly did not obey -- in the days of Noah; the same spirit that was made alive at his death, (3:18), was the spirit that spoke in Noah -- that is, Christ through Noah preached to these people, later referred to as 'spirits in prison' in apocalypse of Enoch, who later died in the flood. (1:10-11). This spirit of Christ later spoke through the prophets. This, of course, is the pre-existent Christ or Logos. Then in 3:18 it was the same spirit liberated at the time of Jesus' death.

According to this view First Peter says nothing about Christ's activity while in the grave.

2. **The Enoch Theory**:

It was in the apocalypse of Enoch, which is the most important of all the apocryphal writings for the history of religious thought, that the expression "spirits in prison" is used. This theory "thinks the author was using the apocalypse of Enoch which tells about Enoch going down from heaven after his translation to preach to the spirits in prison."\(^1\) (Jude 14 uses Enoch). This view would reject the Noah theory and contend

---

that it was Christ's pre-existent spirit that preached through Enoch to the underworld rather than Christ's spirit that was liberated from the body at his death 3:18 and went and preached then to the underworld.

Since Peter speaks as he does in 1:10-11 and also in 3:19 it is not impossible that he had in mind the pre-existent Christ preaching through Noah or Enoch, with no references to activity in the grave.

Rendel Harris suggests that by a textual error (haplography) the word "Enoch" has fallen out after "in which also," (ENΣΧΑΙ, ΕΝΩΧ), that is, "in which spirit (Enoch) also went and preached to the spirits in prison. This reference to the apocryphal story that Enoch made a proclamation to imprisoned angels. (Enoch 6:4ff.)"¹

Hunter speaks of the difficulty in interpreting "in which Christ went and preached to the spirits in prison," in which, in the spirit, is distinguished from, the flesh, his human life. It was, he believes, in the power of the spirit that Christ went and preached to the spirits in prison. He continues by saying:

The simplest meaning is that our Lord descended between his Passion and resurrection, to preach to certain spirits imprisoned in Hades. (Hades, or Sheol, was no longer regarded as the abode of pitiless shades, but partly as a place of punishment and partly as an intermediate state.) But who were the imprisoned spirits? Just possibly the fallen angels of Gen. 6:1-4. Much more probably Peter meant the spirits of the rebellious generation who perished in the flood. (Gen. 6:12ff).

¹Hunter, op. cit., p. 132.
Christ went down "in the spirit," says Peter, into Hades, between his death and resurrection, in order to offer salvation to sinners who had died without hearing the Gospel and getting a chance to repent.¹

Chase speaks concerning the spirits in prison and Christ preaching to them by saying "Christ once and for all dealing decisively with sins, died, the just on behalf of the unjust, that He might bring them afar to God."² "On the one hand, his being put to death in regard to his flesh was his quickening in regard to His spirit."³ "He journeyed and made proclamation to the spirits in prison, spirits who slighted God's long-suffering when the Ark was being built."⁴

Robinson explains this passage, "that Jesus in the spirit, went down into Hades and preached to the spirits imprisoned there, with reference to Gen. 6:1-4."

They were bound (the spirits) and imprisoned in Sheol, or Hades. Peter, then is here stating the universality of Christ's salvation, that he went even to the world of the dead, and saved even those superhuman spirits condemned in the days of Noah.

Scholars, Harris, Goodspeed, Moffatt, have noted that in the original Greek text the first words of v. 19, "in which also," έν οἷς δὲ ἦσαν, was originally ἐν οἷς καί, and should be translated "Enoch" went and preached. This saves the passage from the peculiar statement concerning Jesus which is not found in the New Testament outside First Peter. But Peter also says (4:6) that the Gospel was preached to the dead, and that the supernatural world is subject to Jesus (3:22). In any case Jesus was persecuted, he suffered and

¹Hunter, op. cit., p. 132.
²Chase, op. cit., p. 793.
³Ibid, p. 793.
⁴Ibid, p. 793.
died, but his spirit marched triumphantly on saving and healing, until he now dwells at the right hand of God.1

Bigg believes there can be no doubt that the event is to be placed between the crucifixion and the ascension. He states, "what St. Peter says is that Christ not only ministered to men upon earth, but also went as a spirit to preach to spirits in prison."2 He thinks the "context seems to imply that these spirits were those of the men who refused to listen to Noah."3 He dismisses the explanation that Christ was in Noah when Noah preached repentance to the people of his time.

In St. Peter's view (4:6) Christ preached the Gospel to these spirits, and offered them a place of repentance. Under the influence of later theological ideas many commentators have been unwilling to admit this maintaining (1) that Christ must have preached to them not hope, but condemnation; or (2) that He preached only to those that were righteous; or (3) only to those who, though disobedient, repented in the hour of death; or (4) that He preached the Gospel to those who had been just, and condemnation to those who had disobeyed. But all these after thoughts are excluded by the text. St. Peter clearly means that all men of the time except eight souls were disobedient. The thought which underlies St. Peter's words is that there can be no salvation without repentance, and that there is no fair chance of repentance without the hearing of the Gospel. Those who lived before the advent of our Lord could not hear, and therefore God's mercy would not condemn them finally till they had listened to this last appeal.4

Moffatt interprets Peter saying here, "it was in the

---

1Robinson, op. cit., p. 1342.
2Bigg, op. cit., p. 162.
3Ibid., p. 162.
4Ibid., p. 162.
spirit, after Enoch was translated to heaven, that Enoch went down on his famous mission to the imprisoned spirits."¹

He believes that Peter follows the other tradition (Enoch 12:1), "which gave Enoch the honour of being commissioned by God to go down from heaven to announce a sentence of final doom to the rebellious angels who had (Gen. 6:1-7) demoralized mankind so deeply that the flood had to be sent."²

They were spirits who had defiled themselves with the flesh (Enoch 15:4), and were punished by being imprisoned at the flood. In vain they fled to God for mercy. At his bidding Enoch went and preached doom to them, telling them from God that they were to have "no peace nor forgiveness of sin." Enoch's activity in the spirit was very different from Christ's; the one went down, on a mission of gloom; the other went up; triumphing over all that kept men from receiving the mercy of God.³

Augustine and Spitta interpret this passage as meaning an activity of the pre-existent Christ; but feel it is more natural to take it as referring to "His activity in the underworld in the interval between His death and His resurrection."⁴

He carries this Gospel of salvation even to that generation of desperate sinners who died unrepentant and were swept away by the flood.

Beare states:

It has been conjectured that the name of

²Ibid, p. 141.
³Ibid, p. 141.
⁴Beare, op. cit., p. 145.
Enoch originally stood in the text at this point, 3:19 ἐνωκαὶ ἐνω (Schultz, followed by Goodspeed, Moffatt). By postulating a scribal error, easy enough to account for in a mechanical way, it is possible to absolve the author of First Peter of responsibility for the fantastic dream of a descent of Christ into Hades. On the other hand, it is hard to account for the sudden introduction of Enoch into an exposition of the work of Christ! 'Christ was made alive in the spirit; Enoch went in spirit to preach to the spirits in prison'? This is an unimaginable sequence; he is not discussing activities of various personalities 'in the spirit,' but the work of Christ, in the spirit as in the flesh. It is impossible to see what relevance Enoch's visit to Hades could have for him in this connection. The conjecture is therefore to be discarded. The doctrine of the descent of Christ into Hades, belongs to the periphery of Christian teaching, not to the center—if indeed it can have any legitimate place in Christian teaching at all.1

Cranfield speaks of "the spirits in prison as being the generation of mankind which perished in the flood."2 The suggestion that "Christ went and preached" referring to a preaching by Christ "before His incarnation and through the lips of Noah to those, who now are in prison, but at the time of this preaching were still alive, is far fetched."3 The natural reference, he believes, "is to an activity of Christ after his death — presumably in the interval between His death and resurrection."4

Cranfield also believes "these spirits in prison" to be the fallen angels. Those "sons of God" of whose misconduct we hear in Gen. 6. He states the word "spirit is sometimes

---

1Ibid, p. 145.
2Cranfield, op. cit., p. 85.
3Ibid, p. 85.
used in the Bible of angelic beings, and there was a tradition that disobedient angels had been imprisoned by God. (Cf. 2 Pet. 2:4, Jude 6.)

Plumptre, in presenting his interpretation, says that, "we repeat the words which tell us that Christ 'descended into Hell' but they do not move us. Our thoughts about them are indistinct and dim."

We have therefore to take the words as meaning that Christ was "put to death in His flesh, but quickened, endowed with a new power of life, in His spirit." That moment of outward death to the body was the entrance of the spirit into a higher life. The "flesh" was placed in the tomb, but He, in that other element of His nature, went where go the "spirits" of other men. And to whom did he preach? The answer is, "to the spirits in prison," to human spirits like His own, who were in that Hades which for them was as a prison-house, in which they were in word, awaiting a yet future judgment. So far his words were general. But he has in his mind one representative class of all those spirits of the dead to which his Lord's teaching had once and again led his thoughts. (Matt. 24:37; Luke 23:26).

Salmond, in discussing this problem passage, says, "a little library has been written, only to leave it almost as much the subject of debate as before." There are some scholars, indeed, who have ventured to speak of the difficulties of the passage as rather created by its interpreters

---

1 Cranfield, op. cit., pp. 84-5.
3 Ibid, pp. 20-150.
than inherent in itself."1

Hofmann and Schweitzer believe that it refers the scene of the preaching to earth instead of Hades, and the time of the preaching of Noah's day instead of the period between Christ's death and the resurrection. It takes the preacher to have been Christ Himself in His preincarnate activity, and the preaching to have been in the form of the Divine warnings of the time, the spectacle of the building of the Ark, and the various tokens of God's long-suffering.2

Selwyn states that Peter does not, in this epistle, speak of Christ "going to Hades," though his speech in Acts 2 suggests he would have done so had he been asked the "locale of the spirits in prison."3 Selwyn also believes Peter means primarily, if not solely, "the spirits in prison are fallen angels and their progeny whose doing loomed so largely in Jewish apocalyptic literature."4

Wand states that Christ's "body was dead but his spirit was quickened into a new form of activity by which he was enabled to 'preach to the spirits in prison' who also were disembodied."5 "There was a general belief that the fallen angels of Gen. 6 were incarcerated in a prison under the earth."6 "To their prison Christ descended when death had

---

1 Ibid, pp. 474-5.
2 Ibid, pp. 474-5.
3 Selwyn, op. cit., p. 353.
6 Ibid, p. 100.
freed his spirit from the flesh, and proclaimed to them the
news of the fresh opportunity of salvation which he made
possible. 'Preaching to the dead must have meant in part,
at least, the same thing as 'preaching to the spirits in
prison'.

Some scholars believe that the preaching to the spirits
was to save them, but Selwyn and Moffatt especially hold that
it was to condemn them.

Scholars also agree that the most which can be said is
that while these views remain in the area of probabilities,
for the final solution, waiting is involved, which modesty
and a reserve of judgment must become the student.

\footnote{Ibid, p. 100.}
\footnote{Ibid, p. 111.}
CHAPTER IV

THE PROBLEM OF PERSECUTION

According to the writer, he is sending a message to the churches of Asia Minor to help them meet the first demoralizing shock of a sudden and violent outburst of persecution, to reassure them of the truth of their faith, and to encourage them to remain firm in their allegiance to Jesus Christ.

He exhorts them to take persecution as a challenge to exalt and not compromise the ideal of life of which Christ had been the example. They are to trust in the midst of suffering; to let God's process of testing and refining seem to them not strange, as if some strange chance were befalling them. Rather they are to rejoice at their participation in the sufferings of the Christ, that when his glory is revealed their joy may be intensified. To bear Christ's reproach is an outward sign of a spiritual grace resting on them. He encouraged them to suffer for Christ, but not to suffer for any criminal act or for any social indiscretion. But to suffer as a Christian is a reason not for shame but for thanksgiving. They must expect suffering. For the time has come for the judgment to begin with God's household. Let those who must suffer in fulfilment of the divine purpose do right and command themselves to a creator who will not 'forsake
the work of his own hands.' God who called you, He, after your brief space of suffering, will strengthen you.

Throughout the epistle occur the words "suffer and suffering." This fact has led many to believe that it was written especially for Christians in distress in order to give them renewed hope and encouragement. It is a privilege to endure the reproach.

While there seems to be the possibility of being called upon to suffer for righteousness' sake in several passages; it is after 4:12 the change of tone appears as if the writer had heard some fresh news about the development of persecution, which is apparently already beginning.

Here are some of the problems: (1). Were these Christians faced with a definite persecution or with mere unfriendliness from their communities? (2). Was the persecution in progress or only imminent? (3). In whose reign did this persecution come; Nero, Domitian, or Trajan?

The references to suffering and persecution in the letter are as follows:

In 1:6,7 the author speaks of Christians having been put to grief for the time being, if so it must needs be, by manifold trials which are a testing of their faith. Suffering is to be a means of purifying and ennobling of the soul.

2:12 Christians are described as being spoken against as evil-doers or malefactors, but the spectacle of their good
deeds will cause their heathen neighbors to glorify God in the days of visitation.

2:19 Christian slaves are described as suffering unjustly at the hands of their masters.

3:19 Christians are not to requite evil for evil or reviling for reviling. They are to be ready to give an answer - concerning the hope within them.

3:14,15 the suffering for righteousness' sake is described as a blessed thing.

3:6 if Christians only maintain a good conscience by persistent good conduct those who revile them will be shamed into silence.

3:17 what if they should be called upon to suffer? If God requires that of them - then what?

4:4 Christians are described as being reviled and regarded as fanatics for refusing to join in the profligate excesses of the day.

4:14,16 as Christians it is a blessed thing to suffer reproach in the name of Christ, but they are not to suffer as a murderer or a thief.

4:19 Christians who suffer according to the will of God are bidden to commit their lives by doing good to the safe keeping of God as a faithful creator who may be trusted to guard his own handiwork.

5:8,9 Christians are bidden to be sober and vigilant because their adversary the devil goeth about seeking to
devour, but they are not to deny their faith in the time of temptation.

1. Was it a definite persecution, or mere unfriendliness?

Goodspeed says, "it is very clear First Peter was written in times of persecution, and that it is one of the most moving pieces of persecution literature." He believes in the suffering passages a "glimpse is caught of the perils in the midst of which Christians were then living. This persecution is now world-wide."2

Cash also believes "that the burning question of the epistle is that of persecution."3

Christians to whom the author writes are suffering from manifold temptations. Their moral characters had been attacked and as a sect they were labelled as evildoers.4

Beare, suggest that there is the ever present possibility of suffering and persecution throughout, but after 4:12 "suffering and persecution is no longer a vague possibility but is actually raging."5

Barnett believes the persecution was of the Christian communities all over the world. "The emphasis of the epistle

\[1\] Goodspeed, op. cit., p. 272-273.
\[3\] Cash, op. cit., p. 9.
\[4\] Ibid, p. 10.
\[5\] Beare, op. cit., p. 6-7.
are the direct outgrowth of the emergency out of which it came, to help them understand their underserved suffering.\(^1\)

2. Was the persecution in progress or only imminent?

Selwyn in considering the persecution which faced the Christians lists them as being spasmodic, unofficial and social rather than legal in character. He is of the opinion that the nature of the persecution referred to in 4:12-14 indicates persecution much more actual and serious than those of (1:6 or 3:13 ff). "The earlier trials were of a local and haphazard kind, and were not experienced by all."\(^2\) What the Christians of the first century had to fear was not "the Roman law-court but the Roman police and the ebb and flow of public feeling which might precipitate its action."\(^3\)

Dods says it is apparent that the letter was written to Christians who were suffering for their religion. "But the persecution to which they were being subjected does not appear to have been instituted by the magistrate or governor of the district in which they lived, but to have been of a social kind."\(^4\) The Christians addressed in the letter had refused to join their old associates in excess of riots and were

---

\(^1\) Barnett, op. cit., p. 223.
\(^2\) Selwyn, op. cit., pp. 52-53.
\(^3\) Ibid, p. 55.
\(^4\) Dods, op. cit., p. 200.
therefore calumniated. "They were spoken against as evil-
doers and they were invoked by Peter to prove thereby their
court conduct that these accusations are false. These accusations
therefore were social calumnies, and not legal indictments."\(^1\)

Hunter contends that the language of the epistle suggests
an "impending rather than an actual persecution, and that Peter
is preparing his readers for a blow that is about to fall rather
than one that has already fallen."\(^2\) "To stand fast in their
Christian loyalties against the worst that persecution could
do. Suffering for righteousness' sake is blessed."\(^3\)

Wand believes there is doubt concerning "the precise
character of the persecution implied by the letter - also of
the precise history of the early persecutions."\(^4\) He does not
believe all the passages speaking of "suffering" and "perse-
cution" speak with "quite the same voice."\(^5\) After (4:12) he
notes the change of tone.

Chase says, "no persecution policy against the church
had been adopted by the Roman magistrates in Asia Minor."\(^6\)
"Not a word is found in the epistle about men shedding their
blood or laying down their lives for the Gospel."\(^7\) "None of

\(^1\) Ibid, p. 200.
\(^2\) Hunter, op. cit., p. 80.
\(^3\) Ibid, p. 81.
\(^4\) Wand, op. cit., p. 12.
\(^6\) Chase, op. cit., p. 785.
\(^7\) Ibid, p. 785.
the passages, as we have seen, contain any reference to, or hint of organized persecutions."¹

Ramsay states that "Peter does not look back over a period of persecution. It rather looks forward to it as the condition in which the Christians have to live."²

According to Hort the clearest point is that the epistle was written "during a time of rising persecution to men suffering under it, and this persecution must apparently have been of wide extent, covering at least a great part of Asia Minor."³

3. In whose reign did this persecution come; Nero, Domitian, or Trajan?

A brief background is given relative to conditions in each of these emperor's reign.

A. The first great persecution of which we have any direct account is that of Nero. This seems to have at least begun in 64 A.D., and took place and and was confined to Rome, which resulted in the arrest of large numbers of Christians and in the martyrdom, according to tradition, of both Peter and Paul. Nero's law, which treated Christians as "enemies of the human race," "was permissive," which really meant that any local governor could enforce it or relax it as he wished;

¹Ibid, p. 785.
²Ramsay, W. M., Church In The Roman Empire, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1892), p. 282.
³Hort, op. cit., p. 1.
its effect was to make life for every Christian very insecure, for no one knew when persecution might start again.

B. About the year 95, another persecution broke out under the emperor Domitian. Of the extent of this second persecution not very much is known; it may have extended beyond Rome to some of the provinces of the empire, for a few Christians in Bithynia, one of the places to which this epistle was sent, are known to have given up their faith under the threat of persecution about this time.

C. The third outbreak of persecution occurred during the reign of Trajan (112 A.D.). About the persecution under Trajan more is known. It was not confined to Rome, but extended to the provinces of Bithynia and Pontus, two of the places this epistle was mentioned as being sent. In the year 112, Pliny, the governor of the province, wrote a letter to the emperor asking for advice as to what he ought to do with the large number of people who were being brought to him on the charge of being Christians.

If then the "fiery ordeal" mentioned in 4:12 refers to persecution, the persecution must have happened during one of these three times of persecution under one of these emperors. Many scholars think that the most likely one would be during Trajan's reign, which did extend to the provinces to which this epistle was sent. But could it not have been possible that it happened earlier during the Domitian persecution when a few Christians in Bithynia lapsed from the
practice of their religion because of threats, or even under the persecution of Nero?

Under whose reign could this persecution have been? Hort states, "it is here we have to bear in mind the extreme slenderness and incompleteness of all our knowledge about early persecutions."¹ "It is quite possible, even probable, we have no other record of those particular troubles which called forth this epistle."² He believes persecution "begun by Nero or a secondary persecution arising from that would account for the language used, and this falls within St. Peter's life."³ As a second possible alternative, there is no reason why "Asia Minor should not have had persecutions of its own, independent of any known persecution bearing an emperor's name and perhaps even a little earlier than Nero's persecution; and that the language of the epistle might apply to them."⁴

Blenkin states that no official edict was really necessary to legalize the punishment of Christians, and it is "quite possible that persecution may have been countenanced in the provinces by some magistrates before the outbreak of the Neronian persecution."⁵ "In the Neronian persecution it

¹Hort, op. cit., p. 1.
³Ibid, p. 3.
⁴Ibid, p. 3.
⁵Blenkin, op. cit., p. 40.
is disputed whether Christians suffered merely for their religion as Christians or only for other crimes which were attributed to them.1 Nero sought to divert suspicion from himself of having caused the great fire in Rome. This he could do by shifting the blame to the Christians who were already hated and credited with all kinds of crimes, and as votaries of an unlawful religion they could be tortured or executed to satisfy the popular thirst for vengeance. Blenkin then contends the following conclusions may therefore be suggested relating to persecution:

1. That the epistle does not necessarily imply that an official persecution organized by the state was in progress, although some passages would certainly admit of that interpretation.
2. That if such organized persecution is implied the evidence is not inconsistent with what is known of the Neronian persecution.

Goodspeed says, "it is claimed that the letter cannot have been written in Domitian's time because it is not until Trajan that we hear of Christians suffering "for the name."3 (4:14). But Christianity, of course, "was not a permitted religion, and from the very beginning was punishable on that ground; it did not need Trajan to point this out."4 Undoubtedly it was a crime in Trajan's day to be a Christian;

1 Ibid, p. 40.
2 Ibid, p. 44.
3 Goodspeed, op. cit., p. 281.
but so it was in the times of Tiberius, Gaius, Nero and Domitian."

Beare, believes that Pliny's description of his experience and methods "could not conceivably correspond more closely to the words of 4:12-16, and there is certainly nothing resembling it to be found elsewhere in ancient literature or in official documents."  

It would, therefore, seem unnecessary to look further, for the persecution which called forth our letter, and we may make the tentative conjecture that it was written about the same time as Pliny's letter to Trajan, about 111-112 A.D.

The references to persecutions in this epistle do not have the mistreatment of Christians under Nero as their background, says Barnet. "Such allusions to suffering are best satisfied by conditions that existed under Domitian."

---

1 Ibid, p. 284.
4 Barnet, op. cit., p. 217.
This investigation has dealt with some of the problems of First Peter. It was to be an introduction to some of the problems found in this epistle. In the study of each problem selected, effort was made to present the interpretation of scholars, giving both the positive and negative evidence.

(1). In chapters one and two the various theories on authorship were reviewed.

The writer, after studying these different views on authorship, asks, "who then is the author of First Peter?" The answer seemingly is one of uncertainty, for there is no agreement among scholars on authorship. Could Peter then have been the author as tradition claims? The writer is uncertain, but if Peter did not write it, and much evidence rejects it, then evidently no one knows who did.

(2). The third chapter dealt with the problem of the spirits in prison. There is disagreement between scholars but most would hold that the spirits in prison were possibly the spirits of the rebellious generation who perished in the flood; that Christ went down into Hades, between his death and resurrection to offer salvation to sinners who had died without hearing the Gospel. We can see possible reasons for other views, but the above conclusions seem to be the most acceptable.

(3). The fourth chapter was an investigation of the problem of persecution. Persecution seemed to be in progress, which
was more than mere unfriendliness by their neighbors, and these persecuted Christians all over the world were being encouraged to remain true to Jesus Christ in the midst of their underserved suffering.

In whose reign did these persecutions come? There is no general agreement among scholars relative to this problem. It does appear that there was persecution during each emperor's reign.

From the evidence of this study it is difficult to say, but, it seems, that the conditions during the reign of Trajan most nearly describe the persecutions as mentioned in the epistle. Some scholars claim that this persecution could have happened under Nero or Domitian, as well as under Trajan.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS


Ramsay, W. M. Church In The Roman Empire. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1892.


