

INTERPRETING FIRST PETER

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The First Epistle of Peter is perhaps one of the most difficult books to interpret of any in the New Testament. Although the epistle is not long, it contains several very puzzling passages. Of many questions which could be raised regarding this book, this article will consider two:

1. What were the origin and destination of the epistle? It is addressed to "sojourners of the Dispersion;" some writers have interpreted this as meaning that the epistle was originally sent to the Jewish Dispersion.¹ But others consider this figurative, and believe that the readers were primarily Gentiles.² A similar problem arises regarding the city of origin. The writer says "your sister church in Babylon sends greetings" (5:13). Some consider this reference to Babylon literal,³ while others consider it figurative, referring to Rome.⁴

2. I Pet. 3:20-22 states that in Noah's time "eight souls were saved by water," and that "the like figure, even baptism, doth also now save us." How are we to interpret this? In what sense are we saved by baptism? And precisely what is the analogy between baptism and the flood?

Both of these questions have been examined previously by a great many writers. The purpose of this article is not to review all lines of evidence they have put forth. Instead, this article will consider these questions primarily from a single perspective: we will attempt to determine what clues the context offers us in interpreting these passages.

To determine the context we will begin with an overview of the book. This overview will attempt to identify the primary subjects of the book, without regard to the ideas presented about these subjects. Next we will try to determine the relationship between these subjects, and the major points which the author presents regarding them. At this point we will try to construct a very general outline of the book. Does the author discuss the

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1. Leighton, *The First Epistle of Peter* (London, 1870), pp. 5f.
2. Beare, *The First Epistle of Peter* (London, 1958), 2nd ed.;
Cranfield, *The First Epistle of Peter* (London, 1950), p. 14;
Hort, *The First Epistle of Peter* (London, 1898), pp. 7, 16;
Stibbs, *The First Epistle General of Peter* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids: 1960), p. 72;
Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*.
3. Alford, *Greek New Testament*.
4. Beare, *op. cit.*, p. 183;
Cranfield, *op. cit.*, p. 123;
Hort, *op. cit.*, pp. 5f;
Selwyn, *The First Epistle of Peter* (London, 1947), pp. 60, 303f;
Stibbs, *op. cit.*, p. 65;
Zahn, *op. cit.*

same subjects throughout the book, or is the book divided into recognizable sections?

After determining the context, we will investigate the bearing of that context on the two questions raised above. Finally, we will make some brief observations concerning the question of literary forms underlying the epistle.

I. Primary subjects of I Peter

An overview of I Peter shows that three types of words occur very frequently in this book: words for suffering, hope and obedience.

A. Suffering.

It is well recognized that the subject of suffering is a continuous thread throughout the epistle. In the Authorized Version, the following are some of the words which convey this idea: trial (1:7; 4:12), temptation (1:6), tried (1:7), suffering (1:11; 2:19; 4:13; 5:1), suffer (2:20, 21, 23; 3:14, 17, 18; 4:1, 15, 16, 19; 5:10), affliction (5:9), day of visitation (2:12), grief (2:19).

B. Hope

I Peter has been called the Epistle of Hope; some commentators consider this the primary theme of the Epistle.⁵ The epistle contains many words which connote hope, including the following: hope (1:3, 13, 21; 3:15), joy (1:8), rejoice (1:6, 8; 4:13), mercy (1:3), resurrection (1:3; 3:21), inherit (3:9), inheritance (1:4), glory (1:7, 8, 11, 21, 24; 2:20; 4:14; 5:1, 4, 10, 11), salvation (1:5, 9, 10).

C. Obedience.

Although obedience is not so constant a theme as suffering or hope, it is a major theme, and Leighton lists it as one of the three major doctrines of the book.⁶ Selwyn expresses a similar thought when he states that the Subordinationist Principle in I Peter "permeates its whole social teaching."⁷ This is the primary theme from 2:13 through 3:7, and appears in several other places as well. Some words which convey this idea are: obedience (1:2), obedient (1:14), obey(ing) (1:22; 3:1, 6; 4:17), disobedient (2:7, 8; 3:20), submit (2:13; 5:5), subjection (3:1, 5).

References to obedience tend to occur more frequently in I Peter than in other epistles. But even more significant may be the way these words are used. In I Peter they frequently denote submission to human authority; other epistles more often use the words when referring to obedience to God. We can say then that one of the subjects of I Peter is obedience to human authority. Some places where I Peter clearly uses these words in this sense are 2:13, 17, 18; 3:1, 6, 7; 5:5.

II. Primary Themes.

If the primary subjects of I Peter are suffering, hope and obedience to human authority, what does the epistle say about these subjects? Are the subjects independent, or are they related?

5. Wand, *The General Epistles of Peter and Jude* (London, 1934), p. 18;

Owens, *The Letter of the Larger Hope*.

6. *Op. cit.*, p. 2.

7. *Op. cit.*, p. 84.

As can be seen from the references in the preceding section, the words for suffering appear in every chapter. The words for hope also appear in each chapter, but are especially frequently in the first. In 1:6, 7 we find the relationship between these subjects. Presently the readers were "in heaviness," but they should rejoice "that the trial of your faith . . . might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." Peter compares this "trial" to the refining of gold.

Several other verses repeat this theme that *suffering is to be followed by glory*. The point is repeatedly illustrated from the life of Christ (1:3, 4, 11, 21; 2:19-21, 4:13, 5:1, 10). The theme is especially explicit in 1:11.

It seems then that the subjects of suffering and hope are part of a single theme: glory to follow suffering. But what about the subject of human authority? Is this a separate subject?

This subject begins at 2:13. Verses 13-15 state that rulers are sent "for the punishment of evildoers" and that the readers' obedience to human authorities will "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." Apparently, then, the subjects of suffering and obedience are related: in the face of persecution and suffering, it is important to be obedient to human authority.

Several reasons are given in I Peter for good conduct. In 2:19, 20 and 4:14-16 the thought is that God's approval rests on those who suffer wrongfully for Christ, not those who are justly punished for their sins. Furthermore, several verses (2:13, 14; 3:10, 13) imply that obedience and right conduct will often save the readers from punishment. And 2:12 expresses the thought that the readers' upright conduct may cause even their accusers to glorify God.

To summarize, then, all chapters of the book deal with suffering and persecution. The first chapter emphasizes primarily the glory which will follow the readers' suffering. Beginning at 2:12 Peter then stresses what should be their conduct in the face of persecution. He gives three main reasons for remaining obedient to God and human authority:

1. So that many of them may be spared from persecution. (Especially in chapters 2 and 3.)
2. The glory which follows suffering is only for those who suffer *for Christ*. (Especially indicated in chapter 4.)
3. The Christians' accusers may themselves come to glorify God, when they see the Christians' good works.

Many writers have seen a turning point at I Peter 4:12; before this, they say, the persecution is a theoretical possibility. After this point it is treated as an actuality.⁸ In terms of the above outline, we may say that the emphasis before 4:12 is primarily on how Christians can escape persecution by exemplary conduct. After 4:12, the emphasis changes. In 4:17, 18 Peter refers to the persecution, and observes that even the righteous will be "scarcely saved." But we must postpone any further discussion of this point to a later section of this article.

8. Beare, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

III. Are "Babylon" and "Diaspora" literal or figurative?

Several passages in I Peter seem to imply that the readers included Gentiles. For example, 2:10 states that the readers "in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God." In 1:18 we read that they were redeemed "from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers." These passages seem to indicate that the readers included Gentiles, so the phrase "sojourners of the Dispersion" (1:1) must be figurative.⁹ This could suggest that the reference to Babylon was figurative also.

But some writers disagree. It is argued, for example, that the provinces in 1:1 are named primarily from east to west, and that this would be the natural order if the epistle was written from the east. But Hort has shown that this order would be at least as natural if the epistle was written from Rome.¹⁰

In Revelation, the name Babylon seems quite clearly to signify Rome,¹¹ which may cause us to consider whether Peter is not using the name in a similar sense. But we should accept such an interpretation only if there is specific reason for believing that such an interpretation is intended. We need to ask ourselves whether Peter had reason to use a symbolic name for Rome, and specifically, whether he had reason to use the name Babylon.

If I Peter was written by the apostle Peter prior to his death under Nero, as the traditional view states, there may be a very specific analogy implied by the use of the terms "Babylon" and "Diaspora." Tacitus seems to imply that the Neronian persecution, unlike those that followed, was directed only against Christians in Rome. If this is true, certainly as many Christians as possible would have fled the city, as the Quo Vadis story states.¹² I Peter shows evidence of having been written to just such a group of Christians. Peter twice refers to the readers as "sojourners," or as other translations say, "refugees," "pilgrims," or "exiles" (I Pet. 1:1, 2:11). In addition, Peter uses a similar word when he refers to the time of the readers' "sojourning" (I Pet. 1:17). Although these words are usually considered metaphorical, some writers, e.g. Salmon,¹³ interpret them literally.

This may explain Peter's use of the name "Babylon" in referring to Rome. Babylon was the great world power which made war against God's nation, Judah, and dispersed its people throughout the world. Similarly, Rome had dispersed God's nation, the Christians. In this analogy, then, the Christians would correspond to the Diaspora, and Rome to Babylon.¹⁴

If I Peter was written to refugees from Rome, this may also explain

9. Selwyn (*op. cit.*, p. 118) suggests still another possibility. He states that if the term "sojourners" has primarily Gentile believers in mind, then the complete phrase would mean "sojourners in the Dispersion." But it would seem strange to speak of a group of Gentile believers as being scattered among the Jewish Diaspora, which in turn was dispersed among the Gentile nations.

10. *Op. cit.*, pp. 167f.

11. Rev. 17:5, 9, 18; 18:9-19.

12. See *The Acts of Peter*. In some respects this tradition is at variance with the hypothesis proposed here, but it supports the belief that there was a mass exodus from Rome following the fire.

13. Salmon, *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 485.

14. Some writers have suggested a somewhat similar interpretation, namely, that Babylon refers to the *place* of exile. See Selwyn, *op. cit.*, pp. 303f.

the need for Peter to use figurative names for the origin and destination of the epistle. Obviously, Peter could not have said, "I am writing this from Rome to those who have fled to Asia Minor to avoid prosecution as criminals." And yet this is the message he would have needed to convey to the readers, without conveying it to the Romans. What better way could there be to do this than through the analogy of Babylon and the Dispersion?

It seems probable that the exodus from Rome actually began even before the persecution. In fact Tacitus tells us that while the city burned the roads into the countryside were packed with refugees.¹⁵ The fire destroyed two thirds of the city, leaving multitudes homeless. Thousands of persons died in the fire, presumably causing the breakup of many family units. Furthermore, many people must have lost businesses, jobs, and tools of their trade. Others may have been injured and incapacitated. Under such conditions many people must have left the city, perhaps to live with relatives, or simply to begin a new life elsewhere.

Later, when Nero first accused the Christians of starting the fire, the threat of persecution must have caused still more to leave. Many people would no longer have any real ties to the city of Rome, and it would be as easy for them to leave as to remain. And each time a group of Christians left, their Christian friends and relatives in Rome would have even less reason to stay. When the persecution became severe, the remaining Christians would have had a strong incentive for leaving. So it would seem that the persecution was only one of several reasons why Christians fled the city, but it appears to have been the reason that was in Peter's mind when he referred to Rome as "Babylon."

There may be another reference to this exodus from Rome in II Tim. 4:10. According to tradition, Paul died under Nero at about the same time as Peter. In II Tim., Paul states that all of his associates except Luke had fled, and that no one came to his aid at his first defense. This seems to suggest that many Christians fled Rome when persecution appeared imminent, possibly even before Paul's first appearance before Nero. If so, this tends to confirm that fear of impending persecution was a primary cause of the exodus, even if not the only cause.

The persons named by Paul all fled to lands east of Italy, and one, Crescens, went to Galatia. This is one of the provinces to which I Peter was sent. Refugees may have held to many lands besides those named in I Pet. 1:1; the five named here may simply be, as Hort has shown, those which Silas intended to visit.¹⁶ But II Tim. 4:10 apparently confirms the fact that some refugees fled toward the provinces to which I Peter was sent.

One further fact should be noted in this regard. II Peter claims to be

15. Tacitus, xv, 44.

16. Hort, *loc. cit.*

the second epistle written by the apostle Peter to the same readers.¹⁷ It is most natural, therefore, to assume that this epistle was written to essentially the same readers as I Peter. It may be significant, then, that II Pet. 3:15 states that "the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul. . . has written you." Some have imagined that the author here alludes to the Epistle to the Hebrews, but that epistle nowhere contains the statement which is here attributed to Paul. In fact, there seems to be only one epistle in the New Testament which contains such a statement: "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and *longsuffering*; not knowing that the *goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?*" (Rom. 2:4). Note that this statement is found in Paul's Epistle to the *Romans*. If the above hypothesis is correct—if Peter was written to Christians who fled Rome to avoid the Neronian persecution—then these people were essentially the same ones to whom Paul had written a few years earlier. This seems to agree with Peter's statement in his second epistle.

Many recent writers have rejected the hypothesis that I Peter was written during the Neronian persecution. Even some who identify the epistle with this general time period, e.g. Selwyn,¹⁸ believe that it must have been written before, not after the outbreak of persecution. This is generally taken to mean that the epistle was written before the burning of Rome. The principal reasons given for this view are, first, that in 1:1-4:11 the persecution is not an actual fact, but only a possibility. Therefore, it is said, the epistle could not have been written during the violent Neronian persecution. Second, it is argued that I Peter was written when the legal authorities were still thought of as being established for "the punishment of evil doers and for the praise of them that do well." Certainly, it is said, the author would not have written this after the outbreak of the Neronian persecution.

But these objections apply only to the first section of the epistle, not to 4:12ff. The closing section seems to imply that the persecution had either begun, or was expected momentarily (4:12, 17; 5:8-10). Furthermore, the reference to a "fiery trial" (4:12) seems particularly applicable to the Neronian persecution, in which many Christians were burned to death. This reference may therefore suggest that some Christians had already been burned, or at least sentenced to such a death.

If we choose to date the first section before the persecution, we should differentiate between two periods: the period before the burning of Rome, and the period between the fire and the persecution. And dating the epistle in the earlier of these two periods causes some difficulties. It is difficult

17. II Pet. 1:1, 3:1. The date of Peter's death, and therefore the date of II Peter, is uncertain. If Peter died under Nero, as tradition states, his death could not have occurred later than A.D. 67 or early 68. We have no way of knowing how early in the persecution Peter was arrested, how long his trial lasted, or how soon the death sentence was carried out after his trial. From II Tim. 4:6, 11, 21 it appears that Paul expected to live several weeks or months after he first learned that his death was near. But Paul's circumstances may have been different because of his Roman citizenship. About all we really know about the date of II Peter is that it was written when Peter knew that he was about to die (II Pet. 1:14).

18. Op. cit., pp. 59 f.

to explain why, in this period of time, the theme of persecution should be so dominant. The Neronian persecution was a result of the fire, and prior to this time there would have been no reason to anticipate such an extreme persecution.

Furthermore, many writers who date the first section of the epistle in this period believe that it was written at least three or four months before the burning of Rome.¹⁹ But the second section contains evidence that a severe persecution was in progress. This would mean that the closing chapters were written after the fire, and several months after the first section was written. This would appear to be a somewhat complicated view of the epistle, one which should be accepted only if no simpler view is satisfactory. It would also seem strange that the second section would contain no reference to so catastrophic an event as the burning of Rome.

This brings us to the second possibility, that the first section was written after the fire, and immediately before the outbreak of persecution. Tacitus gives us some limited information about this period. Widely circulated rumors accused Nero of starting the fire, and to divert suspicion, Nero looked for a scapegoat. According to Tacitus, some Christians were induced to confess their guilt and to implicate others.²⁰ For Nero's purposes, then, it was not sufficient simply to persecute the Christians by arbitrary decree. His actions needed to have the outward appearance of legality and justice.

When Nero first began to accuse Christians, there would have been reason for concern that this signalled the beginning of a persecution, even though the persecution had not yet begun. This seems to describe exactly the conditions which we find in the first section of the epistle. Furthermore, this section twice refers to those who accuse the Christians or speak of them as evil doers.²¹ During this period it would also be very appropriate for Peter to caution the Christians that exemplary conduct would be necessary if they were to be spared from persecution. We noted earlier that this is one of the dominant themes in chapters two and three.

This section also contains several statements which would be appropriate following a fire in which many lost possessions, friends and relatives. Peter refers twice to the transitory nature of physical possessions, and once to the brevity of life (1:7, 18, 23, 24). Perhaps in contrast, he refers to the incorruptible inheritance reserved for them in heaven (1:4). In 1:7, after referring to the perishable nature of gold, he goes on to say that even gold must be refined by fire, and he compares this process to the trial of the

19. Walls, in 'Introduction' to *The First Epistle General of Peter* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids: 1960). Also Selwyn, *op. cit.*

20. Tacitus, *loc. cit.* Incidentally, *The Apostle*, by Sholem Asch, contains an interesting fictional account of the events between the burning of Rome and the start of the persecution. According to this story, Nero became aware after the fire of the need to divert suspicion from himself. He deliberated slowly and carefully before deciding to accuse the Christians. Then, instead of bringing accusations himself, he plotted a careful campaign to arouse the Roman populace into charging the Christians with responsibility for the fire. Instigators were sent through the city daily to spread rumors.

Although this is fiction, it appears to be based on a good understanding of Nero's motives and methods.

21. I Pet. 2:12; 3:16.

readers' faith. This analogy would be very apt in the context of the fire which destroyed Rome. The readers' earthly possessions had been consumed, leaving them with nothing but their pure, refined faith.

If Nero was trying at this time to find evidence to incriminate the Christians, he would probably order a search for letters the Roman Christians had written to each other. Peter could therefore assume that any epistle he wrote was likely to find its way into the hands of Roman authorities, and that his statements would be deliberately misconstrued. The dangers could be greatly lessened by disguising the reference to the addressees and place of origin.

It would also be desirable for Peter to use cautious, veiled language when he stated that good conduct would save many Christians from persecution. If the authorities understood what Peter was saying, and could prove that it was written to refugees from Rome, they might cite this as evidence of a conspiracy. At the very least, they would construe this as proof that Christian goodness was only for the purpose of escaping persecution.

According to the hypothesis proposed here, there may have been an interval of only a few days between the writing of the first section of I Peter and the closing chapters. Such a delay would be readily explainable by the fact that Silvanus apparently intended to carry the epistle to the readers.²² The first section may have been written when Silvanus first began to plan his trip, and the closing chapters shortly before his departure. Such a view has fewer difficulties than the hypothesis that the first section was written several months before the burning of Rome.

IV. How does baptism save?

In the preceding sections we have seen that all chapters of I Peter deal with the subject of persecution. We have seen, too, that chapters two and three refer to accusations against Christians, and show how obedience could save many of them. But how does the passage concerning baptism, 3:20-22, fit into this context?

And what is the analogy between baptism and the flood? Peter seems to say that the waters of baptism save people, just as the waters of the flood did. But this would seem to be a very poor analogy, because the flood destroyed people instead of saving them.

Some commentators try to avoid this difficulty by translating the verse differently. For example, the Berkeley translation reads "eight souls were brought safely through the water." But even if we accept this translation, this still does not explain the analogy between the waters of baptism and the waters of the flood.

When we consider the context, however, the analogy becomes more clear. If the Roman authorities were bringing serious accusations against the Christians, any new convert who was baptized into the faith could be signing his own death warrant. The waters of baptism could cause his death just as certainly as the waters of the flood killed people in Noah's day.

22. I Pet. 5:12.

Perhaps some of the readers of I Peter had previously raised such an objection; if so, Peter may be answering them in this passage. He reminds the reader that the eight persons who were obedient to God were not killed by the flood; they were "saved by water." The same waters that killed the disobedient only raised the obedient above death and destruction. Peter says that the same will be true of baptism. The outward act of washing away the filth of the flesh won't save them, it is true. In fact, this act threatens them with death. But if the act is one of true obedience to God, it can save them instead. Peter then gives two reasons why this is true.

First, baptism will save them by "the answer of a *good conscience* to God."²³ What does this have to do with the context? Peter has just told the readers (v. 16) that it is important for them to have a *good conscience* when they are accused. Then "they may be ashamed that falsely accuse you."

We may also note, incidentally, that the repetition of the phrase "good conscience" in 3:16 and 3:21 gives further evidence that the author is still on the same subject; verses 19-22 are not a parenthetical comment on an unrelated subject. Furthermore, the only other use of the word "conscience" in I Peter is in 2:19, also in a context of persecution. This verse states that the readers should be willing, if necessary, to "suffer wrongfully" for "conscience toward God." When we compare this verse with 3:16, 21, we again see the paradox that the readers may suffer for their conscience, or that conscience may save them from suffering.

Peter then tells a second way baptism can save them: "by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is gone into heaven and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him."

What does Christ's resurrection have to do with baptism? According to Rom. 6:4, 5, baptism symbolizes Christ's death and resurrection. And it is because of his resurrection that Christ has "angels and authorities and powers subject unto him." Because of his resurrection, then, the Roman authorities can do nothing without Christ's permission. But how can the readers claim the benefits of his resurrection, unless they are willing to be identified with his death and resurrection by baptism?

It seems then that this passage, like the ones before and after it, fits into the primary themes of the epistle. More specifically, it repeats the theme that obedience to God and man will save many from persecution, a theme often stated in chapters two and three. When looked at in this way, the analogy between baptism and the flood is an excellent one. In each case water destroys the disobedient, while saving the obedient from physical death.

There may be other evidence to support this interpretation. In II Peter

23. I Pet. 3:21. Another problem in the interpretation of this verse concerns the word *eperotema*, which is variously translated as appeal, pledge, or answer. Selwyn cites numerous different usages of this word, including some which have definite juristic application. He cites Herodotus and Thucydides as using it of a test question, and quotes Greeven that it is also used to mean "judgment" or "decision." Such interpretations would accord well with the views presented here concerning the context of the verse.

there is a similar passage, and in it the author makes much the same point as in I Peter:

“For if God . . . spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly . . . the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation” (II Pet. 2:4, 5, 9).

As in I Pet. 3:20, the basic thought here is that the flood destroyed the disobedient, but not the obedient.

The only other epistle which mentions Noah and the flood is Hebrews, in 11:7. This passage also contains these same elements:

“By faith Noah . . . prepared an ark *to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world.*”

The writer here points out the paradox that the same action which saved Noah and his house condemned the world. Apparently, then, every epistle in the N.T. which refers to Noah alludes to this paradox concerning the flood. This may suggest that this paradox was a familiar teaching in the early church. I Peter could therefore allude to it without stating it explicitly.

Basically, the difference between this interpretation and the more traditional views lies in the interpretation of the word “save.” Does Peter mean that baptism “saves” us in a spiritual or a physical sense? One answer to this question may be found by comparing this passage with I Pet. 4:17, 18, which contains another form of the same word:

“For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin with us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be *saved*, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?” In this passage, the word “saved” means to be spared from the judgment which has fallen on “the house of God.” There seems to be no adequate justification for interpreting this word differently in 3:20, the passage concerning baptism.

Perhaps the most serious argument against this interpretation of 3:20 is its novelty. Many people have read this epistle without seeing in it the interpretation proposed here. Is it reasonable to believe that Peter would have written in a way which could so easily have been misunderstood?

But we have seen earlier that Peter had good reason to make his comments unintelligible to the Roman authorities. In such a situation, the best solution would be for Peter to use somewhat veiled language, together with analogies which would be more clear to the Christian readers than to non-Christians.

V. I Peter as a persecution document.

Many writers treat I Peter primarily as a baptismal homily or a Paschal liturgy, not as an epistle occasioned by persecution. It is contended that I Peter, or at least 1:3-4:11, does not have the character of an epistle. But as Stibbs points out, I Peter comes to us as an epistle, and it is primarily as such that we must study it.²⁴ We should adopt a different view

24. Stibbs, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

of the book only if insuperable difficulties force us to do so.

Do such difficulties exist? Beare cites two facts about 1:3-4:11 to show that this section is not epistolary.²⁵ First, it contains no personal references; second, it contains no references to actual persecution the readers are undergoing, only to hypothetical persecution such as Christians in general might expect.

But the comparative lack of personal references is not confined to 1:3-4:11. Beare himself comments on the fact that the closing section contains no greetings from any Asian Christians who are now living in Rome.²⁶ In fact, no persons are named in the epistle except the author, his amanuensis, and Mark. This is not surprising, if the epistle was written to refugees who were fleeing to avoid prosecution and death. Under such conditions, personal references could be very dangerous to the persons who were named.

Similarly, we have shown earlier that the references to anticipated rather than actual persecution are precisely what we should expect under this hypothesis. So these objections are not adequate grounds for rejecting the hypothesis that I Peter is in its entirety an epistolary persecution document.

It still remains for us to consider the view that the primary subject of I Peter is baptism or the Pascha, rather than persecution. Regarding the former, it may suffice to note the comment of Wall that the only explicit reference to baptism occurs in a (supposedly) parenthetical section.²⁷

The view that I Peter is a Paschal liturgy is shared by many recent writers. Both Cross,²⁸ and Selwyn,²⁹ for example, note similarities between I Peter and the Paschal observances in the second century. Selwyn specifically notes the references to Christ's passion, resurrection and second coming, to baptism, vigil and prayer and fasting, "perhaps the Eucharist," and to Christ as the Lamb. It may be appropriate to consider each of these briefly.

1. *Christ's passion.* It has been noted earlier that Christ's passion is mentioned repeatedly, to illustrate the theme of "glory to follow suffering." Since the same point is made repeatedly concerning the *readers'* suffering, it is reasonable to think of the references to Christ's passion as being an example to the readers in their time of trials.

2. *Christ's resurrection.* Selwyn specifically notes 1:3, 21; 3:18-22. In the first two of these, the resurrection is cited as the basis for the Christian's hope. As such, it is in keeping with the theme "glory to follow suffering," and with the analysis of I Peter which is proposed above.

We have previously shown that 3:18-22 apparently alludes to the persecution which threatened the readers.

3. *Christ's second coming.* Selwyn refers to 1:7, 13; 4:13; 5:11. Again, all of these (except the doxology in 5:11) seem to explicitly or implicitly refer to the readers' suffering.

25. Beare, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

26. Beare, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

27. Stibbs, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

28. Cross, *I Peter, a Paschal Liturgy* (London, 1954).

29. Selwyn, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

4. *Baptism*. The only explicit reference to baptism is in 3:21, and we have previously seen reason to believe that this refers to the impending persecution.

5. *Vigil and Prayer and Fasting*. Selwyn notes 1:13; 4:17; 5:8. We have previously commented on each of these to show that they are apparently related to the subject of the readers' suffering and persecution.

6. "*Perhaps the Eucharist*." In Added Note H, Selwyn observes that some commentators emphatically disagree with his view on this point.

Almost all of these references may therefore be seen as allusions to the readers' suffering. Furthermore, there is no necessary connection between any of these references and the Pascha, however much the content of I Peter may resemble that of later Paschal homilies.

But there remains one reference which is much more closely connected with the Pascha, and less clearly related to the subject of persecution. This is the reference to Christ as the Lamb "without spot or blemish," in 1:19. Cross also notes the similarity between the admonition "gird up the loins of your mind" (1:13) and the commandment to eat the Passover "with your loins girded" (Ex. 12:11).

The close proximity of these two references in I Peter seems to suggest that the Passover was indeed on the author's mind as he wrote this section. But if we conclude that this is the case, we should then ask ourselves why.

We have seen previously that I Peter contains a reference to the Noahic flood, apparently to illustrate a point concerning the readers' suffering and persecution. Similarly, we have seen an analogy concerning Babylon and the Diaspora; once again, we have seen this as an allusion to the plight of the readers. It is easy to suppose that the author's allusion to the Passover was prompted by similar associations. In the O.T., the Israelites' exodus from Egypt was immediately preceded by the destructive act of the Passover angel, from which the Israelites themselves were spared. Perhaps Peter (of Silvanus) sees parallels between this and the Christians' exodus from Rome. This exodus was preceded by the destructive fire in which, perhaps, the lives of most Christians had been spared.

This interpretation is further supported by the reference in 1:16, "Be ye holy; for I am holy." This quotation is taken from Lev. 11:44, 45, and the latter verse reads in full as follows: "For I am the Lord that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy." This suggests that I Peter 1:13-19 is related not simply to the Passover, but to the exodus, which the Passover brought about. This may also be suggested by 1:17, which instructs the readers to "pass the time of your sojourning in fear."

Perhaps we can say then that the subject underlying I Peter is not the Pascha, or Feast of Redemption, but rather the readers' redemption from earthly trials and tribulations. If so, it would be natural for the epistle later to be given a more spiritual interpretation, and adapted for use in Paschal observances. This could account for the similarities we find between I Peter and the Paschal observances in the second century.