Introduction to the Study of First and Second Peter – Better Than Au

It has become relatively common to attach an appendix entitled “About the Author” to the end of a piece of literature. The idea is that by knowing some details about the author or the source of inspiration for their writing, you can better understand and appreciate their work. Fortunately for us, we know a great deal about Peter, the author of the two epistles entitled First and Second Peter. The changes in Peter as he went from a simple Galilean fisherman to a fisher of men, preeminent evangelist, pillar of the early church in Jerusalem, founder of the church in Rome, and author, were miraculous. An early commentator, describing Peter, wrote,

“The contrast between the Peter of the gospels—impulsive, unsteadfast, slow of heart to understand the mysteries of the kingdom—and the same apostle as he meets us in the Acts, firm and courageous, ready to go to prison and to death, the preacher of the faith, the interpreter of Scripture, is one of the most convincing proofs of the power of Christ’s resurrection and the mighty working of the Pentecostal gift.”

What was the occasion and purpose of the letters Peter wrote? While commentators have suggested several themes of the epistles, most agree they are letters of hope to those in the midst of suffering and testing. Topverse.com ranks both First and Second Peter among the top ten most popular books in the Bible (based upon analysis of 37 million references online). Not surprisingly, the study shows these books are most popular in those countries where believers are openly subject to persecution.

The very early church was tolerated by the Roman government and assumed to be a subset of Judaism. This changed dramatically when Nero became Caesar. Nero had a passion for architecture and building but was frustrated by the overbuilt cluttered metropolis of Rome during his early rule. Nero came up with a unique idea for urban renewal: start a fire in the wood tenements of Rome, forcing redevelopment. On July 19 of AD 64, fire broke out and consumed most of Rome, including many of the pagan shrines and temples. The public outcry was deafening, but like any good politician, Nero deflected public blame from himself to a suitable scapegoat: Christians. Christians had been mistrusted because of their unwillingness to participate in pagan rituals and misrepresented as cannibals due to misunderstanding of the sacrament of communion. Literally overnight, being a Christian became a capital offense. The Appian Way leading into Rome was lined with crosses holding condemned believers.

Early church history tells us that Peter was crucified next to his wife upside down because he felt himself unworthy to die in the same manner as his Lord. The savagery of Nero’s persecution has been unmatched in history. Christians were bound to stakes, rolled in pitch, and set aflame to serve as lights for Nero’s garden parties. Nero sewed the skins of animals
around those unwilling to deny the name of Christ and threw them to his hunting dogs for execution. It was during this persecution that the apostle Paul was also executed. Things aren’t always as they appear, as William Barclay notes: “Today men name their sons Peter and Paul and their dogs Caesar and Nero.”

Besides the common fate shared by Peter and Paul under the persecution of Nero, another link between the two men helps explain the structure of the first epistle. Although early church fathers universally accepted Peter as the author of First Peter, recent so-called scholars have complained that the Greek was too sophisticated for a simple fisherman from Capernaum. Silas, or Silvanus, was Paul’s companion on his second missionary journey and assisted, along with Timothy, in writing First and Second Thessalonians. Furthermore, Silas is identified as a prophet (Acts 15:32), a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37), a leader in the early church in Jerusalem, and aided Peter in writing his first letter (1 Peter 5:12). The phrase “by Silvanus” implies the work of an editor or a secretary and not merely a scribe.

Many of us can identify with the character of Peter presented in the gospels. But the good news is that in the midst of the trials of this world, we have hope. And with the empowering of the Spirit, we can follow the imperatives given in this letter and be transformed into the man of God which Peter became.

The Link Between the Early Preaching in the Church and First Peter:

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<tr>
<th>Message</th>
<th>Preaching in Acts</th>
<th>Writing in First Peter</th>
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<td>The age of fulfillment has dawned; the Messianic Age has begun.</td>
<td>Acts 2:14; 3:12; 4:8; 10:34</td>
<td>1 Peter 1:3, 10; 4:7</td>
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<td>Jesus has been exalted to right hand of God and is Messianic Head of the new Israel.</td>
<td>Acts 2:22; 3:13; 4:11; 5:30; 10:31</td>
<td>1 Peter 1:21; 2:7; 2:24; 3:22</td>
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<td>Messianic events will reach their consummation in the return of Jesus in glory and judgment of the living and the dead.</td>
<td>Acts 3:19; 10:42</td>
<td>1 Peter 1:5, 7, 13; 4:5, 13, 17; 5:1</td>
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<td>These facts are the basis for appeal for repentance, an offer of forgiveness, the gift of Holy Spirit and promise of eternal life.</td>
<td>Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 10:43</td>
<td>1 Peter 1:13; 2:1; 4:1</td>
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Major Events in the Life of Peter the Apostle in Chronological Order:

1) Meets Jesus (John 1:36)
2) Miraculous catch of fish and called to be fisher of men (Luke 5:1)
3) Set apart with 11 others as apostles (Matthew 10:2)
4) Walks on the water to Jesus (Matthew 14:25)
5) Confesses Jesus to be the Christ (Mark 8:27)
“You are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church” (Matthew 16:17)
Peter rebukes Jesus and in turn is sternly rebuked (Matthew 16:21)
Along with James and John, witnesses the Transfiguration (Luke 9:28)
The Last Supper—“You shall never wash my feet” and “I will not deny You” (John 13:3; Matthew 26:35)
Along with others, accompanied Jesus in the Garden at Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36)
Denies Jesus (Luke 22:58)
At the tomb (John 20:1)
Restored by Jesus (John 21)
At the Ascension (Acts 1:9)
Pentecost—receives Holy Spirit, gives sermon resulting in conversion of 3,000 (Acts 2:14)
First miracle (heals lame man) and answers to the Sanhedrin (Acts 3:1)
Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1)
Delivered from prison, speaks in temple, and confronts Sanhedrin (Acts 5:14)
In Samaria, confirms believers and confronts Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:14)
Meets Paul (Acts 9:26)
Preaches the gospel to Cornelius and other Gentiles (Acts 10:1)
Miraculous deliverance from death sentence in prison (Acts 12:2)