

TO GOD'S ELECT, STRANGERS IN THE WORLD

This five-week study of the letters known as First and Second Peter is created primarily for people who have little or no current knowledge of the Bible, or these Petrine letters in particular.

STRANGERS IN THE WORLD

By the time of these letters, in the later half of the first century, Roman officials had become suspicious of Christianity. The new religion was despised by many as a foreign religion whose converts seemed to subvert the hierarchy of the Roman culture, especially through insubordination within households. Christians were unafraid to behave differently from the surrounding Roman cultural expectations. Note that I Peter addresses Christians as aliens and exiles, while also including a household code (I Peter 3:1-12) which expressed some core values of Greco-Roman society, perhaps in a move to bridge the gap between Christian and pagan societal life.

AUTHORSHIP

The letters both claim authorship by Peter, presumably referring to Simon Peter, one of the 12 apostles. However, pseudonymous authorship was an accepted practice in the first century and it is possible that a follower of Peter wrote the letters after his death. The author may have been Peter, or it could have been another Christian leader in the first decade or two after Peter's death in Rome around 64 A.D. (scholars date the letters from 62 A.D. to no later than 90 A.D.).

This hypothesis of pseudonymous author relates more to II Peter, which seems to be a farewell address, which in Jewish literature was often written by another disciple after the death of their teacher, in the name of that teacher. The two letters differ a good deal in vocabulary and style and the second letter seems to be written by someone with a scribal background. It remains possible that a professional scribe wrote the letter with Peter using the flowery, verbose, rhetorical style popular of the time.

SOCIAL SETTING OF THE LETTERS

The texts have the salutations, thanksgiving and blessings common to letters of the time and it can be assumed that these texts were first letters from one person or group to Christian churches in persecution. The letters are written in the first century A.D. to Roman provinces in Asia Minor (present day Turkey) during a time of some Christian persecution, though it was not as great as the persecutions to follow. There are references to the Christians as aliens, sojourners, and strangers, which suggest that the Christians were in some way separate from the culture around them. The letters do not call on the Christians to be separate as much as they acknowledge the separation which is already present.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR IN YOUR READING

These letters, particularly I Peter, are saturated with Old Testament quotations, themes, and allusions. One feature of this for I Peter is that the governing metaphor of the letter is the image of the church as Israel. This epistle takes images that applied to Israel and applies them directly to the Christian Church. For example, in quoting Hosea 2:23, the Christians were once no people who received no mercy. This uses the images found of Israel in Hosea and makes them Christian. The theology here is that Christianity is the true Israel.

I Peter also plays with one image in several ways. This is seen in the second chapter where Christ is the stone, the corner stone, the stone the builders reject and the stumbling block. Christians are the stone; the stones together build a house or temple. There are allusions here to Exodus 19:6, Psalm 118:22, Isaiah 28:16, and Isaiah 61:6.

II Peter is written to counteract the false teaching taking place within Christian churches. The false teaching seems to have overemphasized grace to the point that nothing is forbidden. The teachers were also skeptical about Jesus' return as it had not yet occurred and some of his disciples had already died. Notice how the letter counters this teaching in the excessive rhetoric of the times. Also note the use of scripture in this second letter, which includes Paul's writings (II Peter 3:15-18).



PLAN FOR STUDY

Reading the text ahead of the class will be helpful. Here is what the course will cover:

Week	Passage
1	I Peter 1
2	I Peter 2-3
3	I Peter 4-5
4	II Peter 1
5	II Peter 2-3

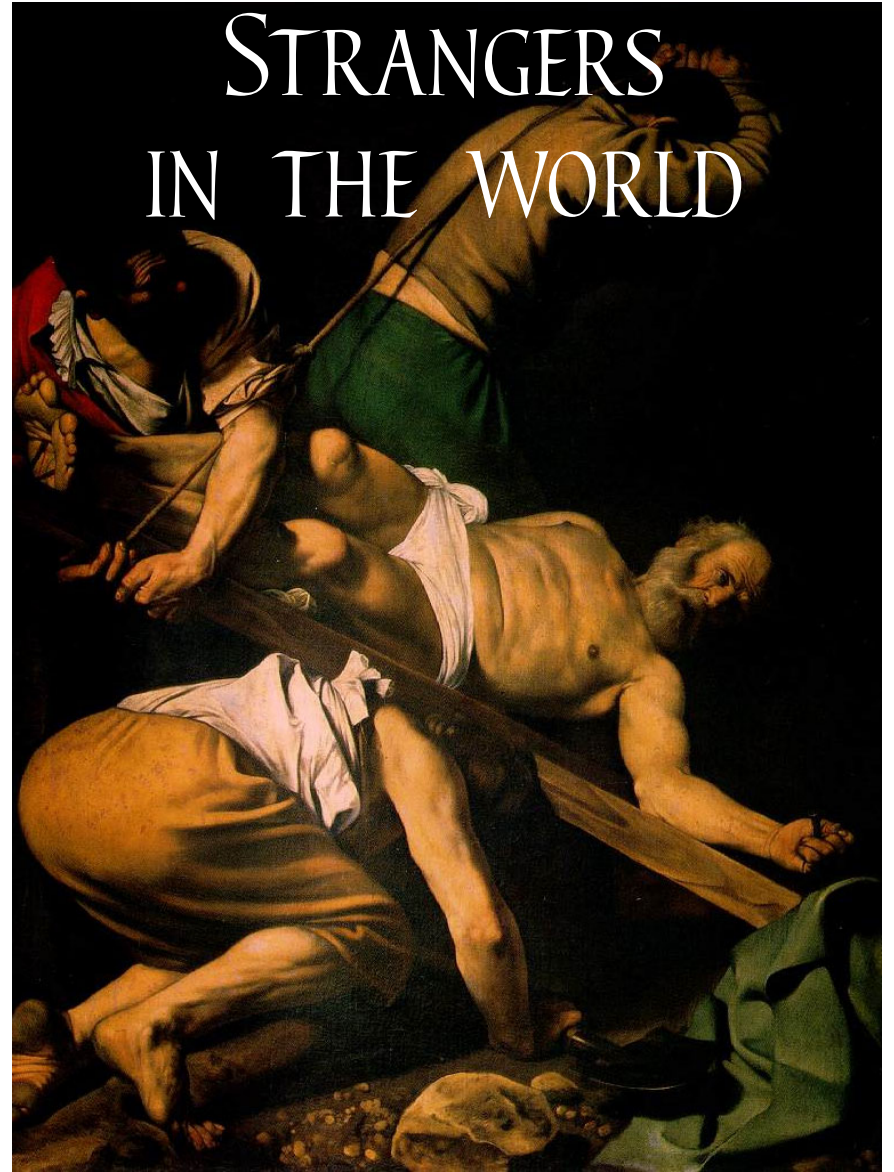
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A 5-WEEK STUDY OF
I AND II PETER