

## A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO FIRST PETER

Since First Peter is one of the "General Epistles" it is important to see where these epistles fit dispensationally. That they are blessedly *for* us is granted out of hand (2 Tim 3:16). But to what extent, if any, are they *to* us? Several considerations indicate that they are addressed specifically *to* the nation of Israel.

First of all, let us consider the situation to be faced by this nation during the Tribulation. They will need revelation for the particular day in which they live -- not one given in "sundry times and divers manners" (Heb. 1:1), not one which may be characterized as "seeing through a glass darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12), as is their Old Testament, but a "face to face" revelation for them such as we have for us in Paul's epistles. Their Old Testament will be very helpful to them (even more than it is to us), and the gospels will lay the foundation for their faith in a crucified and risen Savior, but where will they go for specific instructions for their day by day lives at such a time?

We have every reason to believe that the written revelation God has for His people is already complete. Therefore, if those in the Tribulation are to have special and specific instructions for that time those instructions must already be in the Bible. But where are they?

While Paul's epistles will be FOR them, will they also be TO them?

Suppose a believer in Israel (for there will be a believing remnant in that day) longs for some word of comfort during the great testings he is going through. If he turns to First Thessalonians chapter four he will read, "Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess. 4:18). "Praise the Lord, I have found it" he might exclaim, but looking closer he is cast into despair, for the comfort offered is based on the coming of Christ in the Rapture -- and he has missed it!

Longing for a close relationship with Christ, he might notice First Corinthians twelve and read, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one Body ... Now ye are the Body of Christ -" (1 Cor. 12:13, 27). But he has missed this special relationship, for the Body of Christ has been completed and taken to heaven. Many other details given by Paul will not fit his situation, and will be of only academic interest. Where is he to go for epistolary truth which is not only for him, but also TO him?

This is where the General Epistles seem to find their most literal application, and realize their prime purpose. Both of Peter's letters are filled with references to great suffering, but not once does he point to the Rapture for comfort. It is the coming in glory, which will then be less than seven years in the future, to which he directs attention. As to the relationship with Christ, not once does he inform the believers to whom he writes that they are members of the Body of Christ. Instead he reveals that they are "lively stones built up into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:5); "A chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession" (1Pet. 2:9 NASB -- quoting Old Testament Scripture addressed to Israel).

This view fits particularly well with the concept that those New Testament saints who were saved before the beginning of the Body of Christ continued with their kingdom hope, and did not become members of that Body. While this interpretation is debatable, and is rejected by many -- perhaps most -- of the pastors and teachers in the "grace movement," it does enable us to better understand why the believers at Jerusalem were "all zealous for the Law" (Acts. 21:20 NASB) and why Paul, who was teaching the Gentiles, "Ye are not under Law" (Rom. 6:14), did not object, or seek to instruct them more perfectly. If the Jews to whom Peter wrote (1 Pet. 1:1; 2 Pet. 3:1), until they died out and disappeared from the scene, still had their kingdom hope, then even epistles written with the Tribulation particularly in view would minister to them more

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totally than would Paul's epistles. Epistles written to believing Jews during the transition period, if they were still a part of the kingdom program, would also be addressed to the Jews of the future Tribulation, for they would both be part of the same prophetic program.

While recognizing the special place of the General Epistles in the canon of Scripture, we must study them with care and find all the "horizontal truth" and spiritual principles embodied there for our profit, instruction and blessing. It is beyond the scope of this introduction to solve all the problems this approach may incur, or answer all the objections, which may be raised. It is enough if the student will at least bear in mind that Peter is specifically addressing the dispersed Jews and that there may be some parts of his message which do not apply directly to the Body of Christ. We can enjoy and profit from the General Epistles just as thoroughly as the Tribulation believers will be able to enjoy and profit from Paul's epistles after we have been called home. We will both have to "rightly divide the word of truth."

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