

The Case for Petrine Authorship of 1 Peter

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The First Epistle of Peter begins with this declaration: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Peter 1:1). During the past couple of centuries, however, some scholars have argued against Petrine authorship of 1 Peter.¹ Yet there are still scholars who hold to the traditional authorship of this epistle.² What are the issues involved in this debate? What evidence and reasoning have scholars used to conclude that Peter did or did not write 1 Peter? What are the strengths and weaknesses of these arguments?

The purpose of this paper is multifaceted. First, I will establish the case for Petrine authorship of 1 Peter. Second, I will present and evaluate the most important arguments to the contrary. Third, I will discuss what is known about Greco-Roman scribes, their involvement in the production of New Testament documents, and the implication of scribal activity on the issue of Peter the Apostle being the author of 1 Peter. I will demonstrate that there are reasonable answers to the arguments against Petrine authorship of 1 Peter.³ Finally, I will conclude by putting the issue of traditional authorship into proper perspective. While on the one hand it is essential for Latter-day Saints to be informed about

the scriptures, one must not lose sight of the fact that it is more important to possess a testimony of the truth of the doctrines taught in a particular book of the Bible than it is to know exactly who wrote it.

The Case for Petrine Authorship

A satisfactory case can be made in favor of Petrine authorship of 1 Peter. There is a correlation between the content of the letter and what is known of the historical figure of Peter. The author of the epistle refers to himself as “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:1) and Peter is unambiguously identified as an Apostle in the Gospels (see Matthew 10:2; Luke 6:13–14), the book of Acts (see Acts 2:37; 5:29), and Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians (see Galatians 1:18–19). In addition, the author claims to be “a witness of the sufferings of Christ” (1 Peter 5:1). It should be noted that the word *witness* could be understood two different ways, either an eyewitness or one who testifies.⁴ Although there is no scriptural record of Peter being present at the Crucifixion, it is a possibility.⁵ John was certainly present when Jesus was crucified (see John 19:25–27), and he and Peter are often mentioned as being together during much of the Passion, including in Gethsemane (see Matthew 26:36–37), during the interrogation before Caiaphas (see John 18:15–16), and at the tomb (see John 20:2–4). Even if Peter was not an eyewitness to the Crucifixion, however, the author’s claim to be “a witness of the sufferings of Christ” certainly matches what we know of Peter after the Resurrection, when he boldly testified, or witnessed, concerning the suffering, death, and Resurrection of Jesus the Messiah (see Acts 2:22–36; 3:12–26).

The author of 1 Peter states that he is writing to members of the church who are “scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Peter 1:1). Although there is no account of Peter actually visiting those locations in Asia Minor, the book of Acts does indicate that on the day of Pentecost, Peter interacted with Jews “out of every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5), including those whose homelands were in “Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia” (Acts 2:9). On that sacred occasion, the disciples spoke in tongues, Peter addressed the crowds, and “they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41). It is likely that some of those three thousand new converts were from Asia Minor, who then brought the gospel with them when they returned home. This would help explain Peter’s personal concern for the Christians living in those areas of Anatolia.

The origin of the letter is stated to be “the church that is at Babylon” (1 Peter 5:13), which is very likely a code name for Rome.⁶ Similarly, the book of Revelation also identifies Rome as Babylon, a city with seven hills (Revelation 16:19 and

17:9).⁷ Although the book of Acts only contains the narrative of Paul traveling to Rome, many early Christian sources also place Peter in Rome for the last few years of his life as well as for his martyrdom.⁸

The author of the letter also indicates that he has a close relationship with “Marcus my son” (1 Peter 5:13). This may be the same John Mark with whose family Peter had found refuge years earlier. When Peter was miraculously freed from prison in Jerusalem, “he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark” (Acts 12:12). John Mark later accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their mission to Cyprus (Acts 12:25; 13:5). A number of early Christian traditions also associate Peter with John Mark during the latter part of the Apostle’s ministry in Rome.⁹

The letter makes frequent use of the Old Testament. For example, the author quotes from the books of Leviticus, Isaiah, Psalms, and Proverbs¹⁰ and appeals to the stories of Sarah, Abraham, and Noah.¹¹ These are the kinds of references one might expect from a man who had been raised in a devout Jewish household of the time period. Josephus, a Jewish historian from the first century AD, interpreted the Torah to instruct parents “to teach reading, in relation to the laws . . . that they know about the exploits of their forebears.”¹² Concerning whether this might be done in a particular household, however, Raymond E. Brown has wisely cautioned that it would “depend upon the piety of their parents.”¹³ Indications are that Peter grew up in an observant family. Years later, when he saw his famous vision on a rooftop in Joppa, Peter declared that he had always lived according to Jewish dietary laws (see Acts 10:13–14).

There are a number of concepts in the letter that are also associated with what we know of Peter from the Gospels and the book of Acts. For instance, the author teaches that God the Father “without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work” (1 Peter 1:17). Similarly, in the book of Acts, Peter was taught by revelation that “God is no respecter of persons” and that “in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” (Acts 10:34–35). In another example, the author encourages “the elders which are among you” to “feed the flock of God” (1 Peter 5:1–2), which echoes the repeated instruction of the resurrected Jesus to Peter along the shore of the Sea of Galilee: “feed my sheep” (John 21:15–17).¹⁴

One argument that some scholars have attempted to use against Petrine authorship is the claim that the letter contains ideas that are thought to originate from later periods of time following the death of Peter, which was probably around AD 64.¹⁵ On the contrary, however, there are certain theological perspectives presented in the letter that point to a date of composition within the understood

lifetime of Peter. Some of these are similar to what we find in the Pauline epistles, all of which date to before AD 64.¹⁶

For example, there is what Elliott calls “a vibrant eschatology,”¹⁷ or in other words an expectation of the Second Coming of Christ, which permeates Paul’s epistles. The author of 1 Peter testifies that through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, Christians can have a dynamic hope of eternal life to sustain them through trials so that they might be found worthy “at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1: 3–7). Paul likewise taught that some people sorrow at the death of loved ones because they lack a testimony “that Jesus died and rose again” and have no “hope” that “the Lord himself shall descend from heaven” (1 Thessalonians 4:13–16).¹⁸

The epistle also reflects a period in the development of church hierarchy consistent with a composition date before AD 64. The earliest local church leadership was not one bishop¹⁹ presiding over one congregation. Rather the ecclesiastical structure differed from congregation to congregation and only later developed into a mono-episcopacy (or structure of having a single bishop over a single congregation).²⁰ Rather than addressing one bishop over a single congregation, the author of 1 Peter addresses leaders within the congregation as “elders” and even identifies himself as “also an elder” (1 Peter 5:1).²¹ We find this description of church leaders associated with other congregations in Asia Minor—in particular the church at Ephesus. When Paul was traveling to Jerusalem after his third mission, he stopped at Miletus and “he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church” (Acts 20:17).²² We find further variety in the structure of church hierarchy in Paul’s letters as well. For example, in his Epistle to the Philippians, Paul addressed “the bishops and deacons” (Philippians 1:1) instead of one bishop over the Philippian congregation.²³

Besides the nature of its references to eschatology and ecclesiastical structure, another reason for proposing an early date for 1 Peter concerns its discussion of persecution: “the fiery trial which is to try you” (1 Peter 4:12). The various manifestations of this “fiery trial” mentioned in 1 Peter are described as localized, occasional, and unorganized—primarily having to do with non-Christians speaking evil things against Christians (see 1 Peter 1:6; 2:12, 15; 3:9, 16; 4:12, 16). This is unlike the systematic persecutions ordered by the Emperor Nero in Rome around AD 64–65 and later by others.²⁴ As Elliott has pointed out, the author makes no connection “between the suffering experienced by the believers and Roman anti-Christian aggression.”²⁵ Though an argument from silence, one would expect some type of reference to these specific persecutions if the letter had been composed during or after their occurrence. This glaring omission may indicate that the letter

was more likely to have been written prior to Nero's persecution of Christians and therefore prior to the death of the Apostle Peter.²⁶

Additionally, J. N. D. Kelly concluded that 1 Peter does not possess any of the obvious signs of being pseudonymous. This includes an absence of "a self-conscious straining after verisimilitude," meaning a later author obviously attempting to make a document sound like it is from an earlier era, as well as "the barely concealed assumption that the apostolic age lies in the past."²⁷ Finally, while it is well known that there were debates about whether some documents, such as the book of Revelation, should be included in the canon, there was no such debate about the inclusion of 1 Peter. The acceptance of 1 Peter was early and widespread.²⁸ While this does not prove authorship, it demonstrates the positive manner in which the early church viewed the epistle's apostolic authority and authenticity.²⁹ In summary, from the above data, one can see that there are numerous features of 1 Peter that connect it to Peter and are consistent with the conclusion that the letter was written within the lifetime of the Apostle.

Arguments against Petrine Authorship

A number of arguments have been made against the traditional view of Petrine authorship of 1 Peter. We will discuss the most important ones below. First, the epistle employs very sophisticated Greek vocabulary, style, and rhetoric.³⁰ The claim is that it is highly unlikely that Peter, a first-century Jew from Galilee, would have been familiar and conversant with this level of sophisticated Greek. The book of Acts records that Peter and John were referred to as "unlearned and ignorant men" (Acts 4:13). One must not exaggerate this identification, however, which probably simply means that they were "deficient in formal rabbinic training."³¹ So while it is unlikely that Peter received the same level and nature of education as Paul, who was trained under the tutelage of the great Jewish teacher Gamaliel (see Acts 22:3), the real question is the extent to which Peter may have been familiar with the Greek language.

Scholars and archaeologists have debated over the level of Hellenization in Galilee during the first century AD. A number of scholars have postulated that Greco-Roman culture was widespread.³² Recently, however, Mark A. Chancey has argued that the archaeological evidence does not support this theory.³³ While the paucity of explicitly Greek or Roman material culture from the first century certainly serves to caution scholars against making exaggerated claims about the level of Hellenistic influence in Galilee during the lifetime of Peter, it is an argument from silence. Ongoing excavations continue to bring to light new evidence to evaluate. The archaeologists who have excavated et-Tell, a possible site of Bethsaida located

near Capernaum just east of the River Jordan, have discovered remains of what they conclude were a Hellenistic temple and Roman temple, including a bronze incense shovel and small figurines uncovered nearby.³⁴ Chancey doubts that these sites were actually pagan cultic installations because no altars, statues, bones of sacrificed animals, or dedicatory inscriptions were discovered within the buildings themselves.³⁵ Carl Savage, on the other hand, has recently analyzed the pottery and other material culture discovered at et-Tell and concluded that while the dominant population and culture were definitely Jewish during the first century, there also existed “an interplay between local culture and Greco-Roman culture.”³⁶

In addition to archaeology, other important factors should also be considered. One must not forget that in Capernaum, Peter “was surrounded by Greeks and other gentiles living in the Decapolis as well as by Syro-phenicians in the Huleh Valley and toward Caesarea Philippi.”³⁷ The Decapolis consisted of ten Hellenistic cities founded sometime after the conquest of Alexander the Great and reestablished as Roman cities after Pompey conquered Judea in the first century BC.³⁸ In particular, the Decapolis city and port of Hippos were only a few miles south of Capernaum, along the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Archaeologists have uncovered remains of a Roman temple in Hippos from the first century BC, built on the foundations of an earlier Hellenistic temple.³⁹ The Gospel of Mark says that Jesus, presumably with Peter and the other disciples, visited the region of the Decapolis (see Mark 7:31). The Gospel of Matthew indicates that once his fame began to spread, inhabitants from the Decapolis followed Jesus (see Matthew 4:25).

Even closer to Capernaum, however, was Bethsaida, just east of the River Jordan as it empties into the Sea of Galilee. Whether or not et-Tell is to be identified with the city, Bethsaida was nevertheless the capital of the territory of Gaulanitis, which encompassed such Jewish strongholds as Gamla, as well as a significant Gentile population. By AD 30, Herod Philip had made Bethsaida into a Greek *polis* and renamed it Bethsaida-Julias.⁴⁰ The Gospel of John says that Philip, Andrew, and Peter were all originally “of Bethsaida” (John 1:44; see John 12:21). Although Simon is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name Simeon, the names Philip and Andrew are both Greek with no Hebrew equivalents—a fact that some scholars interpret as evidence of Greek influence in the area.⁴¹ Jesus visited Bethsaida multiple times with his disciples and performed miracles (see Mark 8:22–26; Luke 9:10–17).⁴²

In his study of the fishing industry at the Sea of Galilee, Jerome Murphy-O'Connor has concluded that since eating fish was standard for both the Jewish and non-Jewish population, it was likely that some of those involved in the

business of catching, processing, and selling fish would have had some basic understanding of Greek to communicate with those from areas immediately surrounding Galilee to sell their product.⁴³ The Gospel of John records an instance in which it seems that at least Philip demonstrates the ability to communicate in Greek. When Jesus and his disciples traveled to Jerusalem for Passover, “certain Greeks” (John 12:20) approached Philip, who the Gospel of John reminds us was “of Bethsaida of Galilee” (John 12:21), and asked to see Jesus. Whether they were Gentiles or diaspora Jews, the assumption of the text is that the request “was uttered in Greek.”⁴⁴ Some scholars have concluded that the implication of the story is that these Greeks approached Philip because he had a Greek name, was from a place influenced by Gentiles (i.e., in Gaulanitis and near the Decapolis), and could therefore understand Greek.⁴⁵ While none of these items prove that Peter spoke Greek fluently during his time in Galilee, it at least suggests that having a basic knowledge of the language was possible.

A second argument against Petrine authorship of 1 Peter is related to the first one. When the letter quotes from or alludes to the Old Testament, it does so using language from the Greek Septuagint (LXX), not the traditional Hebrew text or the Aramaic Targums. According to Elliott, the allusions to the Septuagint “indicate a writer thinking in terms of the LXX, not the Hebrew,” which is again “difficult to reconcile with an unschooled, Aramaic-speaking fisherman, whose Bible would have been Hebrew and whose language of worship would have been Palestinian Aramaic.”⁴⁶ In response to this claim, as I have outlined above, it is at least possible that someone like Peter, who lived and worked in general proximity to Gentiles living around Galilee, Gaulanitis, and the Decapolis, could have possessed a basic understanding of the Greek language.

More importantly, however, neither of these first two arguments against Petrine authorship considers implications of the fact that 1 Peter was written many years after Peter left his home in Galilee. For over three decades after the Crucifixion, Peter seems to have had significant interaction with those who spoke Greek. On the day of Pentecost, Peter received an outpouring of the Holy Ghost and manifested the gift of tongues as he “began to speak with other tongues” (Acts 2:4) to diaspora Jews “out of every nation” (Acts 2:5). Even if Peter did not possess a fluency in Greek during the time he grew up in Galilee, the gift of tongues combined with his experiences teaching Gentiles and diaspora Jews over the next thirty years could have helped him develop a general familiarity with the Septuagint.

The New Testament narrates a number of instances in which Peter worked among Hellenistic Jews as well as among Gentiles. In Jerusalem, Peter was faced with the controversy between the “Grecians” (Acts 6:1), or Greek-speaking

Jewish Christians, and the Hebrews. While in Joppa, Peter spoke with the men of Cornelius, a Roman centurion who was stationed in Caesarea Maritima (see Acts 10:1–5, 19–23). Peter then traveled to Caesarea and conversed with Cornelius himself (see Acts 10:25–33). Later, Paul reveals that in Antioch the chief Apostle “did eat with the Gentiles” (Galatians 2:12). In addition, as was mentioned above, early Christian tradition indicates that Peter spent the last few years of his life in Rome, where he was eventually martyred.

Thus, as Richard Neitzel Holzapel and Thomas Wayment have concluded, by the time 1 Peter was written, “Peter had traveled extensively around the eastern Mediterranean and certainly would have become rather proficient in Greek.”⁴⁷ During that time, according to J. N. D. Kelly, the Septuagint would have been “the Bible for his missionary work abroad.”⁴⁸ A modern corollary might be the months, not years, diligent Latter-day Saint missionaries immersing themselves in a new language need in order to become familiar with the scriptures in that language. And after decades of evangelizing those who spoke Greek, it is certainly possible that Peter had developed a working knowledge of the Septuagint.

It should be noted that Papias, an early Christian writer from the second century AD, preserves the tradition that John Mark assisted Peter in Rome.⁴⁹ Papias, citing an earlier John the Presbyter, states, “Mark, who had been Peter’s interpreter, wrote down carefully, but not in order, all that he remembered of the Lord’s sayings and doings.”⁵⁰ What does this mean? The Greek word *hermēneutēs* is usually translated as “interpreter,” which could mean that Mark acted as Peter’s translator. If, after over thirty years of evangelizing people all over the Mediterranean, Peter was able to communicate in Greek, this understanding may not be accurate. The word *hermēneutēs*, however, can also carry a more general connotation of “one who helps someone to understand thoughts expressed in words.”⁵¹ Robert Gundry has concluded that “Peter knew Greek well enough to speak it for himself” and has proposed that the Greek verbal form “favors that Mark became Peter’s expositor rather than translator.”⁵²

It should also be noted that from her detailed analysis of the Greek of 1 Peter, Karen Jobes has detected Semitic influence in the syntax of the epistle and has concluded that the author’s native language was Semitic. According to Jobes, this enhances the likelihood of native Semitic speakers being able to write in Greek and be familiar with the Septuagint.⁵³

Again, the above items do not prove that Peter was familiar enough with the Greek language that he knew the Septuagint and wrote 1 Peter. But, as Ernest Best has pointed out, even if Peter was primarily comfortable with the Hebrew rather than the Greek, “direct quotations would obviously have been put in

the version to which the readers were accustomed, i.e., the LXX, even though the writer himself was accustomed to another version.”⁵⁴ Paul, who knew both Hebrew and Greek (Acts 21:37–40) and who was trained as a Pharisee under Gamaliel in Jerusalem (see Acts 22:3; Philippians 3:5), used the Septuagint in his letters—the version with which his audience was most familiar.⁵⁵ On the other hand, however, it is possible that the use of the Septuagint in 1 Peter may simply reflect the sophistication of the author’s scribe and therefore may not actually be evidence against Petrine authorship. The use of scribes will be discussed in more detail below.

A third argument against Petrine authorship of 1 Peter centers on the letter’s supposed lack of references to the teachings and ministry of Jesus.⁵⁶ This particular argument is very subjective, as are the others. Robert Gundry has identified a number of possible references in 1 Peter to both the teachings as well as the ministry of Jesus.⁵⁷ While some scholars find them convincing, others do not.

One example has to do with the counsel concerning persecution. Readers are instructed to “greatly rejoice” though they are experiencing “heaviness through manifold temptations” (1 Peter 1:6). In another passage, readers are again encouraged to “rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings” (1 Peter 4:13). This recalls the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus taught his audience that when people “revile” and “persecute” them, they should “rejoice, and be exceeding glad” (Matthew 5:11–12) because of the heavenly reward they will receive and because they are experiencing the same persecutions as the prophets of old.

In another example, the author discusses the suffering of Jesus:

Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:

Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:

Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:

Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. (1 Peter 2:21–24)

There are scholars who do not find this parallel convincing, because it does not sound like an eyewitness account, but rather it is in the language of the messianic prophecy contained in Isaiah 53.⁵⁸ It should be noted that in the book of Acts Peter’s preaching consistently emphasizes to his audiences that the Passion of Jesus was in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (see Acts 2:22–36; 3:12–18).

Similarly, when the Apostle Paul evangelized Asia Minor and Greece, he also emphasized that the prophets of old prophesied of the death and Resurrection of Jesus (see Acts 13:14–37; 17:1–4).

If one consults a list of the quotations and allusions to Isaiah in the New Testament, it is apparent that while New Testament authors often employed Isaiah 61 when discussing the preaching and ministry of Jesus, Isaiah 53 is often quoted or alluded to in conjunction with the Passion of Christ.⁵⁹ A recent study of Isaiah 53 in the New Testament has found that “nearly every NT writer uses at least one allusion with the exception of Jas [James] and Jude.”⁶⁰ Victor Ludlow concluded that Isaiah 53 was a “favorite chapter” New Testament authors used when teaching about the suffering of Jesus.⁶¹ Thus the author’s reference to Isaiah 53 is consistent with Luke’s presentation of Peter as well as the practice of other New Testament writers.⁶²

A similar type of argument is made against Petrine authorship because of a lack of explicit references to the Apostle Paul. If Peter was indeed writing to disciples in Asia Minor, where Paul had spent so much time, it is argued that “he would have made some reference to his brother apostle’s previous work.”⁶³ This criticism, like the one above, is an argument from silence. A letter’s authorship and authenticity should not depend upon its containing the types of things that a modern scholar, two thousand years later, wants it to contain.⁶⁴ It is possible, however, that Peter and Paul were not on the best of terms with one another, because of the conflict they experienced in Antioch years earlier.⁶⁵ On the other hand, the author addresses this letter to those who were living in “Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Peter 1:1). Of those five areas, we only have evidence that Paul visited Galatia and Asia.⁶⁶ The writer simply may have felt that a reference to Paul would not be meaningful to every recipient of the letter.

The final argument against Petrine authorship that we will consider has to do with 1 Peter’s possible connection with the Pauline epistles. It is proposed by some scholars that the author of 1 Peter was familiar with and dependent upon a number of Paul’s epistles, and therefore the letter is unlikely to have been written by Peter himself.⁶⁷ This argument assumes that by the time he would have had any contact with the epistles of Paul, Peter’s own views about the gospel would have been solidified, with the result that he would not likely have been open to new ideas or expressions such as he would have found within the Pauline corpus.

But the stories that the New Testament preserves about Peter paint a different picture of the Apostle. For example, Peter was the first of Jesus’ followers to publically declare that Jesus was “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16), as well the first disciple to allow Gentiles access to the gospel without

keeping the law of Moses (see Acts 10:44–48). As Ernest Best has pointed out concerning this characterization of Peter, “there is no unwillingness in either case to express himself in new ways.”⁶⁸ Thus there is no reason why Peter could not rely upon his fellow Apostle Paul for new ideas on how to express gospel concepts.⁶⁹

On the other hand, however, it should be remembered that none of the supposed parallels between 1 Peter and Paul’s letters is a verbatim quote and there are numerous theological, thematic, and stylistic differences between them, causing John Elliott to conclude that while the writer of 1 Peter may have been familiar with some Pauline material, “it can no longer be claimed that the Petrine author was dependent on Paul for his thoughts and formulations.”⁷⁰ Concerning these similar ideas, J. N. D. Kelly has concluded, “it is much more likely that 1 Peter and the Pauline letters drew independently on common material than that the former borrowed from the latter.”⁷¹

From the above discussion one can see, as Joseph Fitzmyer has concluded, that “none of the reasons against Petrine authorship has been really convincing.”⁷² The arguments typically marshaled against Petrine authorship of 1 Peter can be reasonably answered. It is true that the conclusions that one draws with respect to these issues often depends upon one’s perspective. The predisposal to accept or to doubt traditional authorship of the books of the Bible certainly affects the conclusions that a scholar draws with respect to these issues. But there is certainly no “smoking gun” argument against Petrine authorship. After weighing the evidence of a relationship between the Apostle Peter and the letter 1 Peter, Ernest Best concluded that a link can be made between them. Admittedly, states Best, there is “nothing which enforces such a connection,” but on the other hand, “there is certainly nothing to be detected which is contrary to it.”⁷³ There is, however, one final issue that can give much insight into the authorship of 1 Peter. This will be discussed below.

Scribes and Letter Writing

One of the theories that some scholars have suggested is that Peter used a scribe to compose 1 Peter.⁷⁴ The use of scribes is a well-documented phenomenon from the Greco-Roman world in which Peter lived as well as from the New Testament itself.⁷⁵ The employment of scribes was not merely a necessity for the illiterate, but a convenience for those who could afford it. There is substantial evidence that Paul, who was well educated and certainly could have written his own epistles, used scribes for the writing process.⁷⁶ For example, at the end of his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote: “The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand” (1 Corinthians 16:21).⁷⁷ This indicates that Paul dictated the body of this letter

to a scribe and then signed the end of the letter in his own handwriting.⁷⁸ In one instance among Paul's letters, the scribe actually identifies himself: "I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord" (Romans 16:22).

Lincoln Blumell has shown that scribes were primarily used in three different ways: recorder, editor, and substitute author.⁷⁹ First, they could be used simply as "recorders" who might either re-copy a first draft of a document into an error-free final copy or write while the author dictated the document. This phenomenon was described by Cicero, a famous Roman statesman from the first century BC, who once lamented to his friend Atticus that he needed to dictate a particular letter to an inexperienced scribe "syllable by syllable" but that his regular scribe, Tiro, "can follow whole sentences."⁸⁰

Second, scribes could be used as "editors" who, depending upon the relationship with the author, might be given more freedom in supplying and correcting the vocabulary and style of the final product. As an example, Cicero often commended his scribe Tiro for his expertise in editing Cicero's grammar. On one occasion, however, Cicero discovered a grammatical error in a letter that Tiro had written to him and genially teased his scribe because of it.⁸¹

Finally, scribes could be used as "substitute authors" where the original sender only gave basic instruction but left the production of the document completely up to the scribe. On a particular occasion, a decade after he had been exiled from Rome, Cicero was feeling particularly upset that he had not been able to keep current in his correspondence with others. Cicero wrote a letter to his friend Atticus and made the following request: "I should like you to write in my name to Basilus and to anyone else you like, even to Servilius, and say whatever you think fit."⁸² Although it was not typical for a writer to give a scribe absolute authority over the content of a letter, this example does illustrate the possible influence a scribe might have over the substance of a document. It should be noted that in the first two examples, authors were expected to review the final product to make sure it accurately represented what they intended to say, but in all cases the sender was considered to be the author of the document, even though a scribe was actually responsible for writing it.⁸³

It is possible that Peter also used a scribe when producing 1 Peter. Some scholars have proposed that Peter actually identifies Silvanus⁸⁴ as the scribe when he states that he has written this letter "by Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you" (1 Peter 5:12).⁸⁵ Others, however, argue that 1 Peter does not identify a scribe because the Greek preposition *dia* ("by") is used here to identify the courier of the letter, basically saying that it was delivered to them by means of Silvanus.⁸⁶ It should be noted, however, that not all of Paul's letters identify a scribe either, although it is quite likely that he used one, even for those letters where the use

of a scribe is not explicitly mentioned or detected.⁸⁷ Thus it is possible that Peter may have also used a scribe but did not identify him by name. In addition, as noted above, early Christian tradition places Peter in Rome with John Mark as a *hermèneutês*, suggesting Peter's use of disciples in this type of a supporting role.

The possibility that Peter used a scribe when composing 1 Peter presents a number of intriguing implications. First, the use of a scribe, especially one who was well trained, could explain why the Greek of 1 Peter is so sophisticated. Peter may have given the scribe detailed instructions concerning the content of the letter or maybe an initial draft of a letter, but he may also have allowed the scribe considerable freedom to either correct Peter's Greek or even compose the final product using more eloquent Greek than Peter himself would normally have used in everyday speech.

Second, the use of a scribe, especially a Jewish scribe who had been trained in the Greek version of the scriptures, could help explain the frequent quotations from and the allusions to the Septuagint. Third, the use of a scribe, in particular one that would have been exposed to the teachings of Paul, as Paul's former mission companions Silvanus and Mark would have been, could help explain the similarities between some of the expressions in 1 Peter and Paul's epistles. As Blumell concluded, "In most cases, an individual scribe could imprint a distinct literary style on any document he or she wrote, which would greatly affect its form, vocabulary, and perhaps even content."⁸⁸

Latter-day Saint Perspective and Conclusion

The Prophet Joseph Smith stated that "Peter penned the most sublime language of any of the apostles."⁸⁹ Some might view this statement as indisputable proof of Petrine authorship of 1 Peter. If one examines the context of this statement, however, it is evident that Joseph Smith was giving a sermon based upon what he read in 2 Peter, not 1 Peter.⁹⁰ In addition, this statement does not rule out the possibility that Peter used scribes. If there was anyone who understood the need for secretaries and scribes to help church leaders with their work, it was Joseph Smith, who employed faithful scribes for significant projects throughout his life, including writing the Book of Mormon manuscripts, recording the Joseph Smith Translation, and keeping his own records and journals.

While it has been shown above that a good case can be made for the traditional view of Petrine authorship of 1 Peter and that there are reasonable answers to respond to contrary views, there is no need to be unrealistic or fanatical concerning traditional authorship of the books of the New Testament. Scholarship simply does not possess the tools to either absolutely prove or disprove this issue. One must evaluate

what little evidence has been preserved concerning the exact authorship of biblical books. For example, early Christian tradition states that the Gospel of Mark actually originated in the testimony of Peter, and the Gospels of Matthew and John contain evidence that suggest they were at least partially dependent upon previously written sources and were compiled through the help of scribes.⁹¹ In addition, it is possible that Luke or Barnabas, rather than Paul, composed the epistle to the Hebrews.⁹²

One of the best statements concerning a balanced Latter-day Saint attitude toward traditional authorship comes from President J. Reuben Clark, a member of the First Presidency for almost thirty years:

I am not really concerned, and no man of faith should be, about the exact authorship of the books of the Bible. More than one Prophet may well have written parts of books now collected under one heading. I do not know. There may have been “ghost writers” in those days, as now. The Lord gave Aaron to Moses in an equivalent capacity, and spoke to Israel through Moses by the mouth of Aaron. He may have done the same in other cases. If so, what of it?⁹³

As Latter-day Saints, we are able to accept the traditional authorship of the books of the Bible as long as that tradition is true—and sometimes we cannot know that with certainty. In addition, Latter-day Saints also appreciate the fact that the exact authorship of a particular biblical book pales in importance compared with the principles of the gospel which that document teaches. Thus the issue of exactly who wrote a book of the Bible should not adversely affect our attitude concerning the inspiration of the doctrines of the gospel of Jesus Christ which are contained in that document. If it turns out that Barnabas or Luke wrote Hebrews instead of Paul, that does not diminish the truth that “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Likewise, if it turns out that Silvanus or Mark or some other scribe(s) received instructions from Peter and then wrote down 1 Peter using their own particular vocabulary and style, that does not tarnish the reality that we are “not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18–19).

Notes

1. An important early proponent of this view was F. C. Baur, who in 1835 argued against the authenticity of 1 Peter. See Werner Georg Kümmel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), 130–31.

2. For a brief summary of some of the scholars on the different sides of this issue, I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 21–24, and Birger A. Pearson, “James, 1–2 Peter, Jude,” in *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters*, ed. Eldon Jay Epp and George W. MacRae (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 378–79.

3. This paper will only discuss the authorship of 1 Peter. The books of 1 Peter and 2 Peter are quite different with respect to content and style. The authorship of 2 Peter merits its own study and is therefore beyond the scope of this paper. For a conservative assessment of the authorship of 2 Peter, see Michael J. Kruger, “The Authenticity of 2 Peter,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 4, no. 4 (1999): 645–71.

4. Lewis R. Donelson, *I & II Peter and Jude* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 142.

5. There are later apocryphal sources about Peter, some of which claim that he was present at the Crucifixion. The historicity of these documents, however, is suspect. On this, see Bart D. Ehrman, *Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene: The Followers of Jesus in History and Legend* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 42–49.

6. On this issue, see Oscar Cullmann, *Peter: Disciple, Apostle, Martyr* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 84–87.

7. For more information on this identification in the book of Revelation, see Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 307–36, and Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 82–88.

8. For references, see Markus Bockmuehl, *Simon Peter in Scripture and Memory: The New Testament Apostle in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 99–111, and PHEME PERKINS, *Peter: Apostle for the Whole Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 131–76.

9. See Martin Hengel, *Saint Peter: The Underestimated Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 36–48.

10. For example, 1 Peter 1:16 (=Leviticus 11:44–45), 1:24–25 (=Isaiah 40:6–8), 2:6 (=Isaiah 28:16), 2:7 (=Psalm 118:22), 2:8 (=Isaiah 8:14), 2:22 (=Isaiah 53:9), 3:10–12 (=Psalm 34:12–16), 4:18 (=Proverbs 11:31), and 5:5 (=Proverbs 3:34).

11. 1 Peter 3:5–6 (=Sarah and Abraham); 3:18–22 (=Noah).

12. Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.25 (#204). English translation from John M. G. Barclay, *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary*, vol. 10, *Against Apion* (Boston: Brill, 2007), 287.

13. Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 68.

14. For other concepts found in 1 Peter and also associated with what we know of Peter from the Gospels and the book of Acts, see Norman Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), 1–2, and Alan M. Stibbs and Andrew F. Walls, *The First Epistle General of Peter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 34–37.

15. For a summary of some of these claims, see John H. Elliott, *1 Peter* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 136–38.

16. A convenient chart with the likely dates of Paul's epistles can be found in Thomas A. Wayment, *From Persecutor to Apostle: A Biography of Paul* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), viii–ix.

17. Elliott, *1 Peter*, 119.

18. For other theological perspectives in *1 Peter* which point to an early composition date, see Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 18.

19. The Greek word translated as “bishop” is *episcopos* and means “overseer.”

20. On this, see Peter Iver Kaufman, *Church, Book, and Bishop: Conflict and Authority in Early Latin Christianity* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 7–19. For a more comprehensive study, consult Francis A. Sullivan, *From Apostles to Bishops: The Development of the Episcopacy in the Early Christian Church* (Mahwah, NJ: Sullivan Press, 2001), 54–80.

21. Note also that the author of *3 John*, presumably John the Apostle, also identifies himself as “the elder” (*3 John* 1). In addition, modern revelation teaches that “an apostle is an elder” (D&C 20:38).

22. See also *1 Timothy* 5:17–22. It should be noted that when Paul addressed the elders from Ephesus, he encouraged them to act as “overseers, to feed the church of God” (Acts 20:28). The word translated as “overseers” comes from *episcopos*, which is the Greek word later translated as “bishop.”

23. Contrast, however, Pastoral Epistles that refer to a single bishop who presides over his congregation (*1 Timothy* 3:1–2 and *Titus* 1:7). For other relevant New Testament examples, see R. Eduard Schweizer, “Ministry in the Early Church,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 4:835–42.

24. On these organized persecutions, see Joseph H. Lynch, *Early Christianity: A Brief History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 82–90.

25. Elliott, *1 Peter*, 119.

26. See the detailed discussions of this topic in Donelson, *I & II Peter and Jude*, 11–13, and Joel B. Green, *1 Peter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 8–10.

27. J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1969), 30.

28. Arthur G. Patzia, *The Making of the New Testament: Origin, Collection, Text, and Canon*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 152–53. See the detailed examination in Elliott, *1 Peter*, 138–49.

29. Larry R. Helyer, *The Life and Witness of Peter* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 109.

30. See the extensive discussion in Elliott, *1 Peter*, 41–80.

31. Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 7. See also Helyer, *The Life and Witness of Peter*, 19, and Jobes, *1 Peter*, 326.

32. Note especially, Martin Hengel, *The ‘Hellenization’ of Judea in the First Century after Christ* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989), 30–44.

33. Mark A. Chancey, *Greco-Roman Culture and the Galilee of Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 24–42.

34. Fred Strickert, *Philip's City: From Bethsaida to Julias* (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 39–40, 181–87; see also Rami Arav, “Bethsaida Excavations: Preliminary Report 1994–1996,” in *Bethsaida: A City by the North Shore of the Sea of Galilee*, 4 vols.,

ed. Rami Arav and Richard A. Freund (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 1999), 2:18–24.

35. Chancey, *Greco-Roman Culture and the Galilee of Jesus*, 90–94.

36. Carl E. Savage, *Biblical Bethsaida: An Archaeological Study of the First Century* (New York: Lexington Books, 2011), 138.

37. Jonathan L. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus: A Re-examination of the Evidence* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 217–18.

38. Jean-Paul Rey-Coquais, “Decapolis,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:116–21.

39. Arthur Segal and Michael Eisenberg, “Sussita-Hippos of the Decapolis: Town Planning and Architecture of a Roman-Byzantine City,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 70, no. 2 (June 2007): 97, 102.

40. See the discussion in Strickert, *Philip’s City*, 113–24, 163–88.

41. For example, see the conclusions of Perkins, *Peter*, 40, and Carsten Peter Thiede, *Simon Peter: From Galilee to Rome* (Cape Town, South Africa: Paternoster Press, 1986), 20–21.

42. Later, Jesus cursed Bethsaida because its inhabitants rejected his miracles (Matthew 11:20–24 and Luke 10:13–15).

43. Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “Fishers of Fish, Fishers of Men,” *Bible Review* 15, no. 3 (1999): 24, 27. For similar conclusions, see also Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 7.

44. J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 686.

45. See Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 1:470, and Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 352.

46. Elliott, *1 Peter*, 120.

47. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment, *Making Sense of the New Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010), 469.

48. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, 31.

49. See Michael F. Bird, “Mark: Interpreter of Peter and Disciple of Paul,” in *Paul and the Gospels: Christologies, Conflicts, and Convergences*, ed. Michael F. Bird and Joel Willitts (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 30–61.

50. Quoted in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.15; English translation from G. A. Williamson, trans., *Eusebius: The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, rev. ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 103.

51. Frederick William Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 393.

52. Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 1035–36.

53. See Jobes, *1 Peter*, 327–38, esp. 337.

54. Best, *1 Peter*, 49.

55. Reinhard Feldmeier, *The First Letter of Peter* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), 37.

56. M. Eugene Boring, *1 Peter* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 34–36.

57. Robert H. Gundry, "Verba Christi in 1 Peter: Their Implications concerning the Authorship of 1 Peter and the Authenticity of the Gospel Tradition," *New Testament Studies* 13 (1967): 336–50.

58. See Best, *1 Peter*, 51.

59. For a convenient chart, see Steve Moyise and Maarten J. J. Menken, eds., *Isaiah in the New Testament* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 211–12.

60. Robert John Dixon, *An Examination of the Allusions to Isaiah 52:13–53:12 in the New Testament* (PhD diss., State University of New York at Buffalo, 2008), 225. Dixon's study contains a detailed list of all the New Testament allusions to Isaiah 53 on pp. 221–23.

61. Victor L. Ludlow, "Isaiah as Taught by the New Testament Apostles," in *The New Testament and the Latter-day Saints* (Orem, UT: Randall Book, 1987), 150.

62. For an in-depth study of Isaiah in 1 Peter, see Steve Moyise, "Isaiah in 1 Peter," in *Isaiah in the New Testament*, ed. Steve Moyise and Maarten J. J. Menken (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 175–88.

63. Best, *1 Peter*, 50.

64. The reference to Paul in 2 Peter 3:15–16 will not be used as evidence in this discussion because many modern scholars deem 2 Peter to be pseudonymous, and the authorship of 2 Peter is beyond the scope of this paper.

65. On this, see Frank F. Judd Jr., "The Jerusalem Conference: The First Council of the Christian Church," *Religious Educator* 12, no. 1 (2011): 66–67.

66. According to the book of Acts, Paul was "forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia" as well as "Bithynia" (Acts 16:6–7). Later, of course, Paul does preach throughout Asia.

67. See, for example, Boring, *1 Peter*, 31–32, and Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 4–6.

68. Best, *1 Peter*, 50.

69. Notice that arguments against Petrine authorship criticize from both perspectives: either that it cannot have been written by Peter if it does not contain any references to Paul or that it cannot have been written by Peter if it contains too much dependence upon Paul.

70. Elliott, *1 Peter*, 40.

71. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, 32.

72. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 2 vols. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1968), 1:362.

73. Best, *1 Peter*, 54.

74. For a summary of those who have espoused this view, see Elliott, *1 Peter*, 123–24.

75. In particular, see the comprehensive study of Hans-Josef Klauck, *Ancient Letters and the New Testament: A Guide to Context and Exegesis* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006).

76. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul the Letter-Writer: His World, His Options, His Skills* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 81–93.

77. For similar salutations that indicate Paul's use of scribes, see also Galatians 6:11, 2 Thessalonians 3:17–18, Colossians 4:18, and Philemon 1:19.

78. On Paul's use of scribes, see E. Randolph Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing: Secretaries, Composition and Collection* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 81–93.

79. See Lincoln H. Blumell, "Scribes and Ancient Letters: Implications for the Pauline Epistles," in *How the New Testament Came to Be*, ed. Kent P. Jackson and Frank F. Judd Jr. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 211–13.

80. Cicero, *Atticus*, 13.25.3. Cited in Blumell, "Scribes and Ancient Letters," 211 and 223 n. 14.

81. Cicero, *Familiares*, 16.17.1. Cited in Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 75.

82. Cicero, *Atticus*, 11.5. Cited in Blumell, "Scribes and Ancient Letters," 213.

83. See Blumell, "Scribes and Ancient Letters," 212–13, 223–24, esp. n. 21.

84. Silvanus (or Silas) had been the companion of Paul during his second mission. See Acts 15:40–41; 16:19, 25, 29; 17:4, 10, 15; 18:5. Silvanus seems to have been involved in the production of a number of Paul's epistles. See 2 Corinthians 1:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; and 2 Thessalonians 1:1.

85. An important proponent of this view was Edward Gordon Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter* (London: Macmillan, 1946), 9–17.

86. Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 23–25.

87. On this, see Blumell, "Scribes and Ancient Letters," 218–19.

88. Blumell, "Scribes and Ancient Letters," 209.

89. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1980), 202.

90. William Clayton recorded in his journal: "At 10 Prest. J. preached on 2nd Peter Ch 1." Ehat and Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 202.

91. See Frank F. Judd Jr., "Who Really Wrote the Gospels? A Study of Traditional Authorship," in *How the New Testament Came to Be*, 123–40.

92. See Terrence L. Szink, "Authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews," in *How the New Testament Came to Be*, 243–59.

93. J. Reuben Clark Jr., *On the Way to Immortality and Eternal Life* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1950), 209–10.

