

1 PETER 5:12-14 FINAL GREETINGS...

May 3, 2026
Library Bible Study

1

Jesus' Identity Was Revealed to Peter and the New Believers

- His identity could not be forced on them, but this mystery had to be revealed to them.
- The Good Shepherd goes out to find those tha realize that they are lost without Him.
- To Peter: "No one knows the Son except the Father and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him."

2

1 Peter 5:12–14

11. Final greetings

1. Silas: messenger or editor? (5:12)

Peter says, 'Through Silas . . . I have written.' The NIV translation *with the help of Silas* takes this to mean that Peter employed Silas in the writing of the letter. The phrase is commonly used, however, to describe not the writer, but the bearer, of a letter.¹ The letter to the church at Antioch from the apostles and elders at Jerusalem was sent 'through the hand of' Silas and Judas Barsabbas (Acts 15:23, literally). They were 'leaders among the believers' (Acts 15:22). Peter's description of Silas, *whom I regard as a faithful brother*, supports this understanding. He commends Silas as one worthy to be received. It is evident from the Acts passage that those bearing a letter were not regarded as mere messengers, but as representatives of the sender. Polycarp, in his *Epistle to the Philippians*, says, 'I write these things to you by Crescens, whom I commended to you recently and now commend unto you: for he hath walked blamelessly with us; and I believe also with you in like manner.'²

Alternatively, Peter's phrasing could describe the employment of Silas in the composition of the letter. Dionysius, bishop of Corinth in the second

¹ See Polycarp's *Epistle to the Philippians* 14; Ignatius, *To the Romans* 10:1. Grudem refers to the notes at the conclusions of the Pauline letters; for example, after Romans, 'written through Phoebe the deacon'. These 'subscripts', still printed in older editions of the Authorized Version, were in the 'Textus Receptus' manuscripts. While later than the New Testament documents, they do indicate the use of the phrase 'written through' to describe the bearer rather than the writer. Grudem, pp. 23–24.

² Par. 14, AF, p. 99. Grudem holds that Peter's commendation of Silas fits better with the role of a messenger than of a writer. Note also the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 20, where 'through our brother Marcianus' describes him as the bearer in distinction from Euaeristus 'who wrote the letter' (AF, pp. 115–116).

century, spoke of the letter they had received from the Roman church as 'written to us through Clement'.³ This has usually been taken to mean that Clement wrote the letter on behalf of the Roman church (he is not named in the salutation). Since three other men are mentioned at the end of the letter as 'our messengers', it seems that Clement was not a bearer of the letter, but its author.⁴

In any case, Peter's acknowledgment of Silas as a *faithful brother* would seem to indicate more than that he was a true Christian. Silas, who possessed the prophetic gift, was a brother to the apostle in the work of the ministry.⁵ Silas is associated with the apostle Paul in the address of the Thessalonian letters; a Jew but a Roman citizen, he had been a fellow missionary with the 'apostle to the Gentiles'.⁶ Whether he is here described as serving Peter in the preparation of the letter or representing him in its delivery, he is evidently a close associate. As a trusted brother of the apostle, he could interpret his brief letter. 'It is natural that St. Peter should here speak of him as "trustworthy", one who knew the apostle's mind and could expound it faithfully.'⁷

2. Peter's purpose in writing (5:12)

If Silas did write the letter, either as a secretary for Peter or as an inspired collaborator, it is possible that this last section came from Peter's own hand. Paul, who often dictated his letters, might add a PS in his own handwriting.⁸ Peter's statement beautifully summarizes the whole letter, and the theology on which it is based. Peter writes to exhort and encourage the scattered people of God. They will be facing fiery trials, but Peter can point them to a sure hope in Christ. Peter's encouragement, however, is grounded in his witness. The verb for *testifying*, or bearing witness, is used in the Greek Old Testament for the testimony of witnesses to the

³ Dionysius, cited in Eusebius, IV.23.11. See Bigg, p. 5.

⁴ Grudem finds this 'inconclusive', but does not discuss the description of the 'messengers' in Clement, *Corinthians* 65. Kelly feels that the use of *briefly* in verse 12 so focuses attention on the writing that the phrase cannot refer to the bearing of the letter. Similar phrasing, however, appears regarding Marcianus in the letter of the church of Smyrna to Philomelium (*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 20; AF, p. 115).

⁵ Bénétreau, p. 280. Silas is identified as a prophet in Acts 15:32.

⁶ 'Silvanus' (cf. 1 Thess. 1:1, mg.; 2 Thess. 1:1, mg.) and 'Silas' are two forms of the same name. Silas, after bearing the letter from the 'council' at Jerusalem, became associated with Paul (Acts 15:40; 2 Cor. 1:19). Perhaps it was after Paul's death that he joined Peter.

⁷ Bigg, p. 195.

⁸ 2 Thess. 3:17–18; Gal. 6:11–18; cf. Rom. 16:22.

deed of sale for a piece of property.⁹ Peter is appointed as an apostle to testify to the facts of the gospel. The gospel is true (1:12), and Peter can attest its truth, for Jesus Christ chose him for that witness. The gospel is the good news of the grace of God, the fact that Christ bore our sins in his body on the cross, and is now at the right hand of God (2:24; 3:22). That grace of God will be brought to us when Jesus Christ comes again (1:13).

Because Peter's witness is true, his encouragement is real. In 2 Peter 2:2 we are warned that 'the way of truth' will be brought into disrepute by false teachers. At the end of this letter, too, Peter is concerned that his readers hold fast to the truth. They have received the gospel of God's *grace*. Let them *stand fast in it*.¹⁰ They cling, not to an impersonal moral code, nor to philosophical abstractions. They cling to the grace of God; not what they have done for God, but what God has done for them in Christ.

3. Salutation and benediction (5:13–14)

The ancient city of *Babylon*, doomed by the prophets, had been reduced to ruins; it was largely abandoned at the time Peter wrote. The Jewish population had left, and there is no evidence of a church there or of any apostolic visit to the place.¹¹ A small garrison town in the Nile Delta also bore this name. It seems clear, however, that Peter is using the name symbolically to refer to Rome. This is also done in the book of Revelation (Rev. 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10), and in Jewish literature.¹² Peter does not use the name as a code to disguise the place of his writing; that was not necessary. His point is rather the symbolism of the name. Babylon was the great city of world empire to which the people of God were carried captive. Peter writes to the new Diaspora (1:1), the 'captivity' of the people of God living under the empire of Rome, the new Babylon. The name 'Babylon' also suggests the judgment of this world by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, a theme that is taken up in the book of Revelation.

⁹ Jer. 39:25, LXX; see Jer. 32:10–12 in NIV.

¹⁰ Other manuscripts read 'in which you stand fast'. This is a smoother expression, but the imperative appears to be the better reading. See Kelly, p. 217.

¹¹ Kelly, p. 218; Spicq, *Épîtres*, pp. 180–181. J. Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia* (Brill, 1964).

¹² *Apocalypse of Baruch* 11:1; 67:7; *Sibylline Oracles* 5:143, 159. See the statement in Eusebius, II.15.2: 'Peter calls Rome "Babylon" metaphorically.'

Peter's phrase means literally 'the fellow elect in Babylon'. Since the noun for 'fellow elect' is feminine, some have thought that Peter was referring to his wife, who had accompanied him on his travels, and who, according to tradition, was also martyred.¹³ But for Peter to designate his wife by the phrase 'in Babylon' seems unlikely. From an early time Peter's words have been understood as referring to the church in Rome. That church, like the churches to which Peter writes, is elect, a new people of God, sprinkled with the blood of Christ (1:1–2).

Peter's *greetings* come not only from the church, but also from John Mark, whom Peter calls his *son* in the love of Christ. John Mark had been a disciple from the earliest days. After Pentecost, Christians met for prayer in the home of Mark's mother. Peter joined them there when an angel released him from Herod's prison (Acts 12:12). Many years later, Mark had accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. He turned back when they entered Asia Minor, and was rejected by Paul as a companion on the next journey. He travelled instead with his relative Barnabas.¹⁴ Still later, however, he was Paul's companion in Rome, and profitable to him.¹⁵ Papias, who was probably born before Peter's letter was written, tells us about the writing of Mark's Gospel. Mark, as Peter's 'interpreter', set down accurately, although not in order, the teaching of Peter about the words and deeds of Jesus Christ.¹⁶ Mark was to Peter what Timothy was to Paul, a 'son' in the sense of the book of Proverbs, but more: a son in the gospel.¹⁷

Greet one another with a kiss of love. The gathering of the church is the setting for this command.¹⁸ The letters of Paul and Peter were read in the service of worship; the greeting was given in the service or at its conclusion. Paul uses the phrase 'holy kiss', but Peter says *kiss of love*: not in contrast, of course, but to emphasize the bond of fervent love that must unite brothers and sisters in Christ (1:22; 4:8). The greeting with a kiss was formalized as the 'kiss of peace' in the eucharistic liturgy of later ages. It was reduced to a ritual in which the officiating priest and a deacon put their hands on each other's shoulders and bow their heads. This 'kiss' is

¹³ Bigg. See 1 Cor. 9:5.

¹⁴ Acts 12:25; 13:13; 15:36–39.

¹⁵ Col. 4:10; Phlm. 24; 2 Tim. 4:11.

¹⁶ Eusebius, III.39.15 (AF, p. 265).

¹⁷ Spicq, *Épîtres*, p. 181.

¹⁸ 1 Thess. 5:26–27; Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12. Spicq, *Épîtres*, p. 181.

The Message of 1 Peter

then passed on to a subdeacon and to the clergy in the choir.¹⁹ The apostles were not programming a ritual; their desire was for Christians to show outwardly the tender affection that unites them as brothers and sisters in the Lord. The practice of exchanging greetings in the service of worship or at its conclusion has been making a belated reappearance in some churches. Such greetings were not part of gatherings at the synagogue, but they marked the fellowship and friendship of the home.²⁰ In this respect, too, the church is to show that it is the family of God.

Peace to all of you who are in Christ. Peter concludes his letter, as he began it, by pronouncing the blessing of peace in Christ's name (1:2). Peter had himself received this blessing from the risen Lord, and had been authorized to pronounce peace upon those who received the gospel.²¹ The roar of the lion or the flames of persecution cannot overthrow the shalom of Christ's salvation. 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you . . . Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid' (John 14:27).

That blessing of peace is the portion of all who are *in Christ*. They are God's elect (1:1), chosen in Christ who was foreknown before the creation of the world (1:20). They are sprinkled with the blood of Christ (1:2), who bore their sins in his own body on the cross (2:24). Their union with Christ in his atoning death has ended the reign of sin in their lives (4:1–2). They are believers in the God who raised Christ from the dead and who has given them a share in his resurrection life (1:3–7). In his death and resurrection, Christ represents those who are united to him. By his Spirit he is also joined to them in living fellowship. They have not seen him, but they do love him, and wait with eager hope for his appearing. Peter's apostolic blessing reaches across the centuries and around the globe to all who now share suffering in Christ, and will in a short time share his heavenly glory.

¹⁹ ODCC, pp. 784–785.

²⁰ Spicq, *Épîtres*, p. 181. Mark 14:44; Luke 7:45.

²¹ Luke 24:36; John 20:19, 21, 26; Matt. 10:13; Luke 10:5.

Appendix A

'Resident aliens' – literal or figurative?

Peter addresses 'the elect transients of the Diaspora' in the regions named (1:1).¹ He also speaks of his addressees as 'resident aliens' (1:17; cf. 2:11).

J. H. Elliott argues that the literal meaning of these terms must not be lost; he holds that the author is addressing those who are **not** residents, landowners or Roman citizens, but are either transients or resident aliens in the communities where they live. Elliott does not deny, however, the religious meaning given to these terms in 1 Peter. Christians are urged, as 'transients and resident aliens', to abstain from the evils of Gentile life (2:11; 4:3–5). They do not belong to their cultural past, but have been bought from it at the price of Christ's blood; they have been alienated from their roots so that they must pass the time of their alien residence in fear (1:17–18). Elliott proposes that both the literal and figurative meanings of these terms be kept. Those addressed are an 'admixture of permanent and temporary strangers and aliens' living in Asia Minor 'under conditions of estrangement and socioreligious alienation'.²

Elliott's proposal faces major difficulties, however. Peter is writing to organized Christian communities with elders governing 'God's flock' (5:2–3). Were all the Christian churches of Asia Minor composed of more or less temporary foreigners? We may imagine that an American television preacher might address a message to the 'born-again migrants in Orange County, California'. But is Peter singling out individuals belonging to one social stratum within the Christian community? Is he writing only

¹ *Parepidēmos* ('transient') designates a temporary visitor in distinction from *paroikos*, a resident alien.

² Elliott, *Home*, p. 47.

Jesus never claimed to be divine has to eliminate so much evidence for the theory to work is that the theory is wrong. And not just wrong about the details. It's wrong about the big questions: how we got the Gospels, who Jesus claimed to be, and why it matters.

Which means, of course, that we are thrown back onto the horns of C. S. Lewis's trilemma. His basic point was right: according to all the actual historical evidence we possess, Jesus of Nazareth *did* claim to be God. At least, that's what all four first-century biographies of Jesus say. In both the Gospel of John *and the Synoptic Gospels*, Jesus claims to be God by identifying himself with the heavenly Son of Man and by taking the divine name "I am." In both the Gospel of John *and the Synoptic Gospels*, Jesus acts as if he is God when he performs miracles that only God can do. And in both the Gospel of John *and the Synoptic Gospels*, Jesus is handed over to the Romans to be crucified because some Jewish authorities regarded his claims about himself as blasphemy.

With that said, there is one important point that Lewis's Liar, Lunatic, or Lord argument overlooks. Yes, Jesus acted as if he were God. Yes, Jesus spoke as if he were God. Jesus was even crucified for claiming to be divine. However, as we saw in chapter 10, Jesus did not go around shouting in the streets: "I am God!" Instead, when he taught about the mystery of his identity, he did so gradually, using parables, riddles, and questions. These teachings were designed to lead people to ask for themselves: Who is this man? In other words, Jesus did not shove his divinity down people's throats. He invited them into the mystery of who he was claiming to be.

I think that's very significant. I think it's important that Jesus taught about his divine identity in this way. For it shows that Jesus knew that what he was asking people to believe about him was something that, humanly speaking, couldn't be forced upon them. I think it shows that Jesus understood his identity as a *mystery* that needed to be *revealed*.

Should there be any doubt about this, let's take a look at one final example of how Jesus revealed the mystery of his divinity. It is, perhaps, the most famous example in all the Gospels. So I've saved it for last.

"Flesh and Blood Has Not Revealed This to You"

I am speaking of the revelation to Simon Peter at Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16:13-16; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-21). Consider the account recorded in the Gospel of Matthew:

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do men say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "*But who do you say that I am?*" Simon Peter replied, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! *For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.* And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. (Matthew 16:13-20)

As with every other episode we've looked at in the book, there's lots that could be said here. In fact, this may be one of the most debated passages in the New Testament.¹ For our purposes, I'll make two main points.

First, when it comes to the question of the identity of "the Son of Man"—Jesus's typical way of referring to himself—there are many competing opinions on offer. Some people say Jesus is John the Baptist come back to life, others that he's Elijah returned, still others one of "the prophets" (a modern version of this last option is still popular). The striking thing about this list is that the suggested candidates are all dead. In other words, whoever Jesus is, he's no ordinary man. He has come (or come back) from some other realm. On the other hand, none of the suggestions gets to the heart of what is different and new about Jesus.² As a result, Jesus throws the question back on his disciples. Although they are his students, he doesn't just give them the

answer. He wants *them* to answer the question: “Who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15). They have to decide for themselves.

Second, when Simon Peter steps up and answers Jesus’s question, he doesn’t just affirm that Jesus is the Messiah, which is what “the Christ” (Greek *ho Christos*) means. Simon goes *beyond* messiahship when he confesses that Jesus is also “the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). Here again the Old Testament background is important. The expression “son of God” in Jewish Scripture can be used to refer to an angel, the Davidic king, or the people of Israel. However, in context, Simon Peter’s use of the expression clearly means something much more. It seems to be a confession that Jesus is the *unique Son of God*—that is, the divine Son of God—in a way that’s fundamentally different from the sonship of Israel, or King David, or even the angels.

That, at least, is the only way to explain Jesus’s otherwise baffling response: “Blessed are you, Simon. . . . *For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven*” (Matthew 16:17). In other words, Peter’s ability to recognize that Jesus is the “Son of the living God” is not, in the final analysis, the result of his human effort or intellectual abilities. He was, after all, an “uneducated” fisherman (see Acts 4:13). Peter doesn’t come to believe in Jesus because he was so smart or because he had finally “figured it all out.” Instead, Jesus’s words show that his identity as “the Son” is revealed to Peter by the “Father in heaven” *because Peter is open to receiving the mystery*. In other words, Peter’s insight into who Jesus really is is a result of divine revelation. It’s something that God the Father has to “reveal” (Greek *apokalyptō*) to Simon for him to be able to grasp it (Matthew 16:17).

Should there be any doubt about this, compare Jesus’s response to Peter at Caesarea Philippi with what Jesus says about himself in one of the most exalted claims he makes in all the Gospels (Matthew 11:25-27; Luke 10:21-22). Consider Matthew’s version:

At that time Jesus declared, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, *that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes*; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and

no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” (Matthew 11:25-27)³

With these words, we have yet another saying of Jesus that is often ignored by those who believe that Jesus never claimed to be divine.⁴ For in this passage, Jesus speaks of himself as the unique “Son” of God “the Father” to whom “all things” (Greek *panta*) have been handed over. Moreover, the mystery of God the Father, the Lord of heaven and earth, and the mystery of his Son Jesus, is something “hidden.” As a result, it has to be “revealed” (Greek *apekalyptō*) by God the Father himself (Matthew 11:25; Luke 10:21). And it is revealed to those who are little, like children. Not to those who are proud because they are wise and learned.

In other words, Peter’s ability to recognize and accept the unfathomable mystery of the God of the universe becoming a human being in the person of Jesus of Nazareth is a gift of grace. Now, Peter’s confession of faith in the divine sonship of Jesus is not contrary to his human intellect. After all, Peter witnesses lots of events that point to Jesus’s unique identity, such as the walking on water, the stilling of the storm, and the Transfiguration. In the end, however, according to Jesus, Peter is only able to believe the incomprehensible mystery that Jesus is really “the Son of the living God” because *God himself reveals it to him*. As the apostle Paul would later put it: “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3).

The same thing, I would suggest, is true for us today. I can give you all the historical arguments for how we got the Gospels, all the reasons we should believe they go back to the apostles and their disciples. I can give you all the historical evidence for concluding that Jesus of Nazareth claimed to be the long-awaited Jewish Messiah, the heavenly Son of Man, and the divine Son of God. I can do all these things—and I’ve tried to do them to the best of my ability. But there is one thing I can’t do. I can’t answer the *ultimate* question—the question of whether Jesus of Nazareth *was in fact God*. That is a question you have to answer for yourself.

At least, that's what Jesus seems to have thought. For today, as in the first century, there are lots of opinions about who the man from Nazareth really was. Apparently, it has always been that way, and it probably always will be. But the question Jesus poses to his disciples—the question of his identity—abides. It does not pass away. Despite the almost two thousand years that have transpired since the writing of the Gospels, Jesus's words to Simon Peter at Caesarea Philippi echo down through the centuries, inviting each and every one of us to encounter him as a real historical person and to answer the question he once asked a lowly fisherman from Galilee: "But who do *you* say that I am?"

AFTERWORD

by Robert Barron

About ten years ago I found myself at the Pittsburgh Airport waiting for a car to pick me up and take me to a biblical conference at which I was scheduled to speak. I was, soon enough, joined by two other scholars who were also presenters. Then this young man ambled toward our circle and shyly announced that he was heading to the conference as well. Since he looked as though he were about twenty years old, I presumed that he was a collegiate attendee and I asked him, "Where do you go to school?" To which he responded, "No, no, I already have my doctorate from Notre Dame. I'm a speaker, too!" That's how I met Dr. Brant Pitre—who now looks about twenty-five.

While in the car on the way to the conference, all four of us fell into a lively conversation about biblical interpretation, especially regarding the matter of the reliability of the Gospels. Dr. Pitre averred how annoyed he was by the oft-used comparison between the transmission of the story of Jesus and the "Telephone game." At which point I turned around (I was in the front seat and he in the back) and said, "Yes! Someone needs to write a book dedicated to refuting that stupid comparison." As I'm sure you know, Telephone is the parlor game in which one person whispers a message to another and then he to