

I OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK OF I PETER

PURPOSE: To offer encouragement to suffering and persecuted Christians.

AUTHOR: Peter, the apostle.

TIMELINE: Approximately 62-64 A.D.

SETTING: Peter was possibly in Rome when the great Christian persecution under Nero began in 64 AD. Peter was martyred during this persecution which tortured and killed Christians and scattered them from the church at Jerusalem.

BLUEPRINT: A. God's great blessings to his people (1:1-2:10)

B. Conduct of God's people in the midst of suffering (2:11-4:19)

C. Shepherding of God's people in the midst of suffering (5:1-14)

MEGATHemes OF I PETER

THEME	EXPLANATION	IMPORTANCE
Salvation	Our salvation is a precious gift from God, who chose us out of His love for us. Jesus died to pay the penalty of our sin and the Holy Spirit cleansed us from sin when we believed. Eternal life is a wonderful gift for those who trust in Christ.	Our safety and security are in God. If we experience joy in relationship with Christ now, how much greater will our joy be when He returns and we see Him face to face. Such a hope should motivate us to serve Christ with greater commitment.
Persecution	Peter offers faithful believers comfort and hope. Christians should expect ridicule, rejection, and suffering. Persecution makes us stronger because it refines our faith. We can face persecution victoriously, as Christ did, if we rely on Him.	Christians still suffer for what they believe. We should expect persecution, but we don't have to be terrified by it. The fact that we will live eternally with Christ should give us the confidence, patience, and hope to stand firm even when we are persecuted.
God's family	We are privileged to belong to God's family, a community with Christ as the founder and the foundation. Everyone in this community is related, as we are all brothers and sisters, loved equally by God.	Because Christ is the foundation of our family, we must be devoted, loyal and faithful to Him. By obeying Him, we show that we are His children. We must accept the challenge to live differently from the society around us.
Family Life	Peter encouraged the wives of unbelievers to submit to their husbands' authority as a means to winning them to Christ. He urged all family members to treat others with sympathy, love, compassion and humility.	We must treat our families lovingly. Though it is not easy, willing service is the best way to influence loved ones. To gain the strength we need for self-discipline and submission, we need the help of the Holy Spirit.

THEME	EXPLANATION	IMPORTANCE
Judgment	God will judge everyone with perfect justice and we will all face Him. He will punish evildoers and those who persecute God's people. Those who love Him will be rewarded with life forever in His presence.	Because all are accountable to God, we can leave the judgment of others to Him. We must not hate or resent those who persecute us. We should realize that we will be held responsible for how we live each day.

II BACKGROUND

Peter challenges Christians to be God's people in a world that is often hostile to our convictions. After having establishing the certainty and joy of salvation (I Peter 1:1-12), that holiness is the standard that Christians must embrace (I Peter 1:13-25), identifying the consistency between belief and daily living in which a Christian must display the new identity he or she has in Jesus Christ (I Peter 2:1-12), Peter moved on to a new section (I Peter 2:13-4:19) that considers the nature of the believer's identity. Peter showed that God's promises are not only future-oriented, but have tremendous benefits and privileges attached to them in the present.

The theme of suffering is prominent in I Peter, where he previously addressed the topic and encouraged Christians to be neither surprised nor disappointed that they would face persecution. Because Christians are different from the world, they should expect to be rejected and scorned for their devotion to Jesus. These facts should produce a resolve in believers to live the Christian life faithfully and to shun the worldly ways of their neighbors.

At the time that this was written, persecution had not become as deadly as it would under Nero's final years and later under Domitian (81-96 AD). Though some Christians did suffer physical persecution, Peter still instructed his disciples to respect the emperor and maintain good relations with unbelievers. This train of thought has led Peter to again exhort his readers to faithfulness because they are living in the last days. This section serves as a summary of the major themes of the entire letter.

III SCRIPTURE

BLESSING OF CHRISTIAN SUFFERING (4:12-14)

Peter now moves on to teaching us how we should endure trials with the right attitude. Bitterness, anguish, anger, and self-pity are not viable options, although some choose these.

(12-13) Enduring trials with the right attitude: Instead of thinking of trials as strange and unusual occurrences, we should see them as ways to partake of Christ's sufferings. If we choose to partake of His sufferings, then we will also partake of His glory and joy (**Philippians 1:29**). However, we can only partake of Jesus' sufferings because He voluntarily partook of our humanity and sufferings.

Peter once told Jesus to avoid the suffering of the cross (Mark 8:32-33). "Once it seemed strange to the Apostle Peter that his Master should think of suffering. Now he thinks it strange that He could have imagined anything else." (Meyer)

Jesus became a man and suffered so that our suffering wouldn't be meaningless. Therefore, it is good to share anything with Jesus, even His suffering. Unfortunately, our tendency is to embrace the glory and the joy, and to avoid any sharing of Jesus' suffering. On the other extreme, we morbidly fixate on the suffering and forget that it is a necessary prelude to the glory and joy.

Hebrews 11 lists many believers by name and many unnamed believers who were brutally persecuted. A great book that chronicles how others died because of Christianity is "Foxe's Book of Martyrs" by John Foxe.

We should never deny the place of suffering in building godliness in our Christian life. Though there is much needless pain we bear through lack of knowledge or faith, there is also necessary suffering. If suffering was a suitable tool to teach Jesus (Hebrews 5:8), it is a suitable tool to teach His servants.

(14): Suffering for the name of Christ: Suffering for the name of Christ is a blessing, because it shows that we really are following Jesus, and that we suffer because we are identified with Him as His disciples (John 15:20). At times of suffering for righteousness sake, the Enemy is unable to confuse us with doubt. We know without a doubt that our reward will be great in Heaven.

We expect the world to blaspheme Jesus. But He should always be glorified among Christians.

Peter, as much as anyone, would recognize that such times rarely are felt as a blessing at the moment. Such times only feel like agony. Yet God knows how to bring blessing out of suffering and weakness, as He did with Peter (John 21).

ASSURANCE IN CHRISTIAN SUFFERING (I PETER 4:15-19)

Peter again focuses on Jesus' words in Matthew 5:11 and indicates that Christ will send His Spirit to strengthen those who are persecuted for their faith. Thus, when trouble comes, we should not be surprised. Whenever we suffer for our loyalty to Jesus, He will be with you all of the way.

(15-16): Difference between suffering as a Christian and suffering as an evildoer: Peter tells us that suffering will occur in our lives because of sin in our lives. Suffering consequences as an evildoer is deserved and brings shame to the name of Jesus. Peter recognizes that not all suffering that Christians experience is suffering in the name of Jesus.

We understand when Peter writes about the suffering that might come to the murderer, the thief, or the evildoer. Yet we shouldn't be surprised that he also includes the "busybody" in other people's matters (I Thessalonians 4:11; II Thessalonians 3:11-12). Such people do suffer a lot of grief and pain, but not for the sake of Jesus.

Suffering as a Christian is nothing to be ashamed about, even though the world may despise him or her. Instead of feeling self-pity, we should glorify God in these matters. We don't glorify God for suffering. But we do glorify Him in suffering, and we glorify Him for what He will accomplish in us and through us with the suffering.

It is not shameful for being a Christian. When Peter and John were persecuted for preaching the Good News, they rejoiced because they knew that such persecution was a mark of God's approval of their works (Acts 5:41). Do not look for suffering or seek to avoid it. Instead, keep on doing what is right whether or not it brings suffering.

As a Christian: "The word Christian is found in the New Testament only here and at Acts 11:26 and 26:28; it means 'follower of Christ' - not 'little Christ', as some popular explanations claim." (Grudem)

(17-19) Committing your soul to God in the midst of suffering: Peter speaks of judgment of the saints and the sinner. In the context of suffering, judgment begins at the house of God. We know that God uses suffering as a judgment in a positive, purifying sense for Christians and that there is never any punishment from God for us in our sufferings for righteousness sake, but only purification (i.e., the fire we endure now purifies us).

The same fire that consumes straw will purify gold. The fire is the same, but its purpose in application is different, and its effect is different upon the straw and the gold. Even so, Christians do suffer some of the same things the ungodly do, yet the purpose of God is different, and the effect is different.

For the Christian, the issue of punishment was settled once and for all at the cross, where Jesus endured all the punishment the Christian could ever face from God. This sobering application is clear. If this is what God's children experience, what will become of those who have made themselves His enemies? Can they ever hope to stand before the judgment and wrath of God?

This Scripture refers not to the final judgment, but God's refining discipline (Hebrews 12:7). God often allows believers to sin and then experience the consequences. He does this: (1) to show us our potential for sinning; (2) to encourage us to turn from sin and constantly depend on Him; (3) to prepare us to face other stronger temptations in the future; (4) to help us stay faithful and keep trusting Him.

Peter concludes by telling us that we are called to the duty of suffering, but we can suffer knowing that God is the **keeper of our souls**. So much of the agony we put ourselves through in times of trial and suffering has to do with our disregard of God's faithfulness, or of His place as Creator. He is our sovereign Creator, with the right to do with us as He pleases (**Romans 9:20-22**). Yet He is faithful, and will only do what is ultimately best for us.

Peter talks about commitment. Commit is a technical word used for leaving money on deposit with a trusted friend. Such a trust was regarded as one of the most sacred things in life, and the friend was bound by honor to return the money intact. It is the very word Jesus used when He said, Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit. (**Luke 23:46**). So when Christians commit their souls to Him, they leave their souls in a safe place.

We trust God in good times and in bad. In examining how trust really works, we come to three clear conclusions: (1) Trust overcomes fear: Genuine trust in God says, "Whatever mess I am in, my heavenly Father will lead me"; (2) Trust overcomes depression: No matter how overwhelming the situation or how low it makes you feel, God can draw you back to the light; (3) Trust overcomes hate: When careless or cruel people irreparably hurt you, you have a choice to hate forever or trust God, but you can't do both! God is there to steady you even in the worst situation; always with a promise and always with hope. Therefore, commit your life to Him for safekeeping and rely on Him when you face your worst circumstances.

Christians can rejoice that the sufferings they face in this life are the worst they will ever face, throughout all eternity. We have seen the worst; those who reject Jesus Christ have seen the best of life their eternal existence will ever see.