

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 Peter's first letter, 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 for Christians under Nero's final years and later under Emperor 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

SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER (4:1-6)

I Peter 4 – Serving God in the Last Days

Peter now begins a section on how we should be serving God in the last days and what the attitude of end-times believers should be. He emphasizes that suffering should refine a Christian's commitment to live in ways that honor God and not be an obstacle for appropriating faith.

(1-2) In the last days, Christians should have an attitude of commitment: In the last days, Christians need to have a commitment to God that will endure through possible great struggles and challenges. Jesus, Himself communicated exactly the same idea when He told us that anyone who would come after Him must take up his cross and follow Him (**Matthew 16:24**).

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Taking up the cross means that you are totally committed and you are not looking back (**Luke 9:62**). Jesus also called us to have the kind of attitude that would always be willing to sacrifice in the battle against sin (**Matthew 5:29-30**).

The commitment God calls us to have is nothing greater than the commitment Jesus had in enduring suffering for our salvation (Isaiah 53:1-12). Therefore, in the last days, which Christians have lived in since the First Century, we need to have a commitment to God that will endure through great struggles. This can be accomplished through the spiritual gift of perseverance.

When a Christian has suffered physical persecution for the sake of Jesus, it almost always profoundly changes his outlook regarding sin and the pursuit of the lusts of the flesh and eyes. This Christian is now much more likely to live the rest of his time not in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for fulfilling the will of God.

Suffering helps us be transformed into the image of Christ, yet paradoxically, everyone will do anything to avoid pain. However, followers of Christ should be willing and prepared to do God's Will and suffer for it, if it becomes necessary. We can overcome sin when we focus on Christ and what He wants us to do. Moreover, how we approach pain and danger will reveal our true values. Anyone who suffers for doing good deeds and still faithfully obeys in spite of suffering has likely made a clean break with sin.

Accordingly, many Christians are defeated in the constant battle against sin because they refuse to sacrifice anything in the battle. They only want victory if it comes easily to them.

(3-6) In the last days, Christians should live with an attitude of wisdom: Peter next states that in the last days, Christians should live with an attitude of wisdom, for he realizes we all spent more than enough time living like the world, and now we are called to live like Christians. It is a waste of time for Christians to live like the world, and they must simply stop being double-minded (**James 1:8**), put evil away, embrace God's Will, and start living as Christians.

When the world looks at our godly living, they think it strange that we do not follow them in their flood of dissipation and wastefulness. If life lived after the flesh can be given a definition, it is a waste. Moreover, when Christians do not participate in the sin around them, they convict those who practice their sin, and they don't like that conviction, so they speak evil of us (e.g., look at that holy-roller).

Lewdness means to live without any sense of moral restraint, especially in regard to sexual immorality and violence. When we look at this list that Peter states (i.e., lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, abominable idolatries), we see just how incredibly little fallen man has progressed in the last 2,000 years since Christ provided provision against the "Bondage of the Will" (**Romans 6:17**).

Here is the core problem that all Christians have encountered and will encounter. Since they didn't plunge into the same flood of sin with the pagans, they became outcasts and were slandered. In some cases, the pagans used their earthly power to maim and kill.

People whose lives have been radically changed by their new relationship with Jesus (**II Corinthians 5:17**) may be scorned by their old friends and experience contempt from them. They are treated poorly because they choose to not participate in worldly activities and because their priorities have changed as they are headed in the opposite direction. Their lives now incriminate their friend's activities. Mature Christians should provide a needed support system of encouragement and friendship, helping them to keep being faithful to Jesus.

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Ultimately, the magnitude of their foolishness will be displayed on the day when they will give an account to Jesus who is ready to judge (**Revelation 20:11-15**). Even if one seems to live the “good life”, improperly defined by living by the world’s rules, their vapor of a life will be a waste in the measure of eternity.

Peter states that judgment awaits all people who at some point in time will have to give an account of themselves to a Holy God. Christians persevere and do not lose heart since they are aware that God will always have the last word. We do the right things even when they seem out of step with society, as it is God’s approval that ultimately matters.

Peter also states that because of this eternal judgment the gospel was preached to the dead. The righteous dead know, and live in constant awareness of the reality of eternity and are accordingly rewarded by this understanding as they live according to God in the spirit.

The basis for our salvation is our belief in Jesus (Acts 16:31), but the basis for judgment is how we have lived. All people will be judged (Hebrews 9:27B); believers for the rewards and crowns that they will receive at the Bema judgment, and unbelievers for eternal punishment. All who have ever lived will give an account to God.

Peter has previously told us that Jesus preached to the spirits in prison, preaching a message of judgment (**I Peter 3:19**). Apparently during this same time, Jesus also preached a message of salvation to the faithful dead in Abraham’s Bosom (i.e., Paradise) (**Luke 16:22**), who anticipated the work of the Messiah for them. In doing this, Jesus fulfilled His promise that He would lead captivity captive (**Psalms 66:18; Ephesians 4:8**) and would proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who are bound (**Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18**).

LOVE AND SERVE ONE ANOTHER (4:7-11)

Peter moves on to teach us that we should live expectantly because Christ is coming again soon. Getting ready to meet Christ involves continually growing in love for God and for others (see Jesus’ summary of the law in Matthew 22:37-40). Therefore, it is important to pray regularly and to reach out to needy people. Your possessions, status, and power will mean nothing in God’s Kingdom, but you will spend eternity with other believers. Therefore, invest your time and talents where they will make a real eternal difference.

(7) In the last days, Christians should live with an attitude of serious prayer: In the last days, which are still in force today as it was during the First Century, all Christians must live with an attitude of serious prayer as we see the weight of eternity rushing towards us. Our hearts and minds should be constantly watching ourselves and this world as we ready ourselves for the return of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we should not withdraw from society, gaze heavenward and ignore the needs of others (**I Thessalonians 5:1-11; II Thessalonians 3:6-13**).

The word “end” does not necessarily refer to a chronological time sequence. Rather, it refers to a fulfillment or consummation or a purpose or goal attained. When you look at history from a Biblical perspective, there is nothing left in regards to our Lord’s Second Coming that hinders Him from returning. Therefore, the end times are now in its 20th Century.

(8-11) In the last days, Christians should live with an attitude of love: In these last days, Christians should live with an attitude of love (**Proverbs 10:12**), including those you will be spending eternity with. Love covers all sins (**James 5:20**); both the sins of the one loving and the sins of the one who is being loved (**I Corinthians 13:4-7**).

Love will show itself in hospitality. In these last days, Christians should live with an attitude of hospitality and should open their homes to others; doing it all without grumbling (**III John 5-8**).

Christian hospitality differs from social entertaining. Entertaining focuses on the host (i.e., clean home, good food preparation), while hospitality focuses on the guests' needs (e.g., place to stay, nourishing food, listening ear, acceptance). Don't hesitate to offer hospitality because you are too tired, too busy, or not wealthy enough to entertain.

In **I Corinthians 15:10**, Paul makes it clear that he was what he was only by God's grace. But at the same time, His grace was not in vain because Paul put his own God-inspired efforts to work with God's grace. The idea is that if we are bad stewards of the manifold grace of God, it is as if that **grace was given to us in vain**. Such grace is wasted, because it only comes to us, and doesn't move through us.

Peter then calls on us to exercise our spiritual gifts. Love shows itself in giving to the church family and others in need what God has given us as gifts. We should only do this with a cheerful heart and not because we are obligated to do so. Every part of the Body is important and each has its job to do (**Romans 12:3-6**). Peter tells us how to use our spiritual gifts. As we serve one another in love, we do it with the strength that God provides and the ability which God supplies (**Zechariah 4:6**). Our whole attitude is to do this to enhance God's glory.

Everyone has at least one spiritual gift. Therefore, each of us should seek to find it/them and use them. Peter mentions speaking and serving. Paul lists these and other abilities in **Romans 12:6-8; I Corinthians 12:8-11**, and **Ephesians 4:11**. We are exhorted to glorify God with our abilities by using them as He directs in helping others. When you do this, people will see Jesus in you (**Matthew 5:16**).

Our abilities should be faithfully used in serving others, and none are for our own exclusive enjoyment. Some people feel they have a right to use their abilities as they please, while others feel they have no special talents to give. Peter addresses both of these groups in this Scripture.