

1 Peter study notes

By James West

Background Information:

This epistle may have been written from Babylon in about A.D. 65, after Rome was burnt to the ground in A.D. 64, although there is no record of Peter's ministry in Babylon. Otherwise, he may be speaking cryptically of Rome in 5:13. It is probable that the recipients of this letter were mainly Jews (see 1:1).

In this first epistle, Peter sought to encourage the believers to withstand persecution by bolstering their faith in the coming glorious appearing of Christ. In his second epistle, he will exhort them to stand against apostasy by cleaving to the knowledge of the truth. A key word in this first epistle is 'suffering,' which appears 16 times. A key verse may be 2:9: 'But ye *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.' A key command is to submit to human authorities for the Lord's sake. The main purpose of writing is that Peter's readers may live godly lives in the face of persecution.

Chapter 1: Girding up the loins of the mind

(v. 3) This is not a 'flash-in-the-pan' or a 'spark-in-the-dark' kind of hope. It is a burning and a shining hope, such as that with which the evangelists in the first church burned. This was the kind of hope with which John the Baptist prophesied. It has to be, in order to carry a Christian through the fiery persecution that Peter speaks of in this book. Peter is actually seeking to bolster their hope by writing this epistle, as can be seen in 5:12.

What things can a Christian do to fan into flame this living hope? How should he live?

- Meditate upon the resurrection of Christ
- Meditate upon Christ
- Meditate upon the coming glory
- Live soberly and righteously in this world
- Love the brethren fervently
- Desire God's Word
- In regard to sufferings:
 - Accept sufferings meekly for the cause of Christ
 - Rejoice in sufferings
 - Commit our souls to God
- Elders to take the oversight of God's flock willingly.

One might ask why there is not much mention made in the book about preaching the Gospel, but rather about responding in a Godly way under persecution (e.g. 3:15). There should be no mistake in our minds that the apostles were forthright in their evangelistic efforts. This was a given in the early church which was scattered abroad. We may rightly assume that they were faithfully proclaiming the Gospel, and that they simply needed the tools to withstand the persecution they were encountering in the process.

(v. 4) 'Corruptible' and 'incorruptible' things in these epistles:

- 1 Peter 1:4: Our inheritance in Heaven
- 1:18: Money
- 1:23-25: God's Word
- 3:4: The hidden man; a meek and quiet spirit
- 5:4: The crown of glory
- 2 Peter 1:4 The moral decay of worldliness, caused by lust (1 John 2:15-17)

(v. 5) Things ready to be 'revealed' in this epistle:

- 1:5: Final deliverance
- 1:7: The preciousness of our faith, and the appearing of Jesus Christ
- 1:13: Grace to be brought to us; revelation of Jesus Christ
- 4:13: Christ's glory
- 5:1: The glory to come
- 5:4: The Chief Shepherd

(v. 16) Lev 11:44 quoted.

(v. 22) 'Seeing' refers back to verse 21, and equates the salvation there described to purification of the soul. '*Faith* purifies the heart as giving it the only pure motive, love to God (Act 15:9; Rom 1:5, "*obedience* to the faith")' (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown). The goal Peter drives his readers towards is to love one another with a pure heart fervently (see also 4:8).

Fervently: 'The term suggests increased tension or highly energetic activity.' (1 Peter, Hiebert)

(vv. 23-24) The purpose of God's Word is not only to bring us the saving message of eternal life, but to produce in us works of eternal value, contrary to whatever is done for man's glory. Isaiah 40:6-8 is loosely quoted in verse 24.

(v. 25) Link to 5:12. The Christian must stand confident in the grace of God, if He is to grow deeper in the grace of God (2 Peter 3:18).

Chapter 2: Chosen to Show Forth His Praises

(v. 1) Believers need to lay aside sin, and desire the word of God, so that they can love the brethren with pure and fervent love. This will show forth the praises of God (v. 9), and is tied up with their good works which will shine forth (v.12). The Greek word for 'laying aside' was also used for putting off clothing.

Imagery of a newborn baby feeding (vv. 2-3):

(v. 2) 'Desire' is in the imperative (it is a command). 'Sincere' means 'pure' and 'without deceit'. The Bible is the opposite of all that they are to put aside. They are to desire it, because they have experienced the kindness of its Author.

Imagery of a building, and also the reality of a priesthood (vv. 4-9):

In both the previous illustration, and in these here, we see our absolute dependence upon God for His work to be perfected in us. We have been chosen to be living stones, and we have been chosen to a holy priesthood.

(v. 4) Christ is the living stone, in that He gives life to all the members of His body. '...Disallowed indeed of men': see Psalm 118:22-23, which Jesus quoted.

'According to tradition, during the erection of the temple, an unusually shaped stone was sent up from the quarry and rejected by the builders as useless; only later did they discover that it was the very stone they needed to complete the building.'
(Hiebert, *1 Peter*, p. 139)

(v. 6) Quote from Isaiah 28:16, where God was warning against trusting in an alliance with Assyria, rather than trusting in God. Luke 6:46-49 was Jesus' parable about two men who built houses, one on a rock, and one on the sand.

(v. 8) This verse refers to Isaiah 8:14.

(v. 9) 'Peculiar' translates a word reflecting the idea of a special possession. This shows God's unique purpose for us. The original background to the themes of this verse can be found in Exodus 19:5-6.

(v. 10) Peter refers to Hosea 2:23.

(v. 11) Peter will now devote much of the rest of his epistle to showing his readers how to live as the chosen people of God in a wicked world. Concerning 'strangers' and 'pilgrims': 'The two terms are closely related in meaning. ["Strangers"] denotes people living in a foreign country where they do not have the rights of citizens... ["Pilgrims"] portrays them as living alongside people to whom they do not belong.' (Hiebert, *1 Peter*, p. 155)

The fleshly lusts inside a believer are those things, which, if not denied, will maim him spiritually, and render him useless in his testimony for righteousness.

(v. 12) The unsaved are referred to as 'Gentiles,' not only because of their nationality, but to show the distinction between them and the chosen priesthood of God. If Christians will maintain an honest (morally good) life, it will then be able to point their antagonists to Christ, leading to salvation. 'The day of visitation' probably refers to the time when these are visited by God in mercy for salvation (cross-reference with Matthew 5:16 and its preceding context of persecution).

(v. 13) Reasonably submitting to all levels of human government is a strong testimony for righteousness. It is probable that Peter was writing during the reign of wicked Nero. As long as we are not required to sin by doing so, we must obey governments – not for the rulers' sakes primarily – but for the Lord's honour.

(v. 14) Here we see God's plan for human governments: to punish evil-doers, and to honour those that do right. We must remember, therefore, that God has ordained government for righteous purposes, and that we must therefore submit to government as long as it is right to do so.

(vv. 15-16) Submission to government will be a testimony to wicked men. We are not to misuse our freedom in Christ by spiting the government, but rather to serve God, and to honour and love all men. 'Brotherhood' refers to all Christians. The same Greek word is translated 'brethren' in 5:9.

(v. 18) 'Servants': The same as 'slaves'. The term is used particularly of house slaves. These were to show reverence toward their masters for the Lord's sake. 'But also to the froward; the ill natured, morose, and rigorous; who exact more labour than is requisite; give hard words, and harder blows; withhold sufficiency of food from them, and keep back the hire of their labours.' (John Gill)

(v. 19) 'Thankworthy: Commendable.

(vv. 21-24) Christ was an example for these slaves, who were sometimes beaten by their masters (see Mark 14:65). He did not suffer for his own sins, but rather for ours, with the intent that we should live unto righteousness. It was now possible for these

oppressed Christian slaves to suffer for Christ, because He had first suffered for them. His example in suffering is here described.

(v. 25) In their sufferings, what could they gain by straying from their Shepherd again, in rebellion toward their earthly masters or in distrust of God's good plan for them? He alone could feed and guide them. He alone could truly watch over them as the Bishop of their souls. I am reminded of the wonderful example of the old black slave in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, by Harriet Beecher Stowe.

Chapter 3: God Will Bless the Godly

(vv. 1-4) Where an unsaved husband is unyielding to the word of the Gospel, the wife may yet win him by being in righteous subjection to him. Her marital faithfulness (her purity) together with (*'coupled with'*) an attitude of reverence toward him and God, as well as a meek and quiet spirit will be a strong testimony to persuade him.

N.B. A woman ought not to dress in such a way as to provoke men to lust. Just as a married woman can demonstrate chaste faithfulness toward her husband by modest attire, so an unmarried woman can demonstrate faithfulness toward her future husband, even if she does not yet know who he will be.

A wife's preoccupation with her outward beauty will neither be useful in bringing her unsaved husband to Christ, nor in showing forth God's praises in general (2:9). Nor does Peter mean to say that she should not arrange herself to look beautiful. He is simply saying that the emphasis should not be on the outward woman, but on the inward character of the heart. While a woman grows old physically, her inward character may be renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16).

Meek: Gentle, humble. The wife will have the strength of character to remain under God's rulership, even in submission to her unsaved husband.

Quiet: 'It pictures a quiet disposition as contrasted to a noisy, boisterous attitude.' (Hiebert, *1 Peter*, p. 201)

With respect to a woman's adornment, what truly matters is not what others will think of her expensive and gorgeous attire. It is rather what God thinks, and He esteems a meek and quiet spirit to be the most precious adornment that a woman can have.

(vv. 5-6) Holy women in the Old Testament adorned themselves with this meek and quiet spirit. Their godly subjection to their husbands demonstrated that they trusted in God. Sara is mentioned as an example of this. Christian women must be willing to live a godly life before their husbands, trusting God rather than fearing outcomes.

(v. 7) 'Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with *them* according to knowledge...'

'All husband-wife relations should be governed by "knowledge," a knowledge derived from reason and common sense, as well as an understanding of the Christian principles directing the marriage relationship. That involves the husband's understanding of "the wife's desires, goals, and frustrations; knowledge of her strengths and weaknesses in the physical, emotional and spiritual realms."' (Hiebert, *1 Peter*, pp. 205-206, citing Wayne A. Grudem, *The First Epistles of Peter*, p. 137)

Husbands must honour their wives, especially taking consideration of their physical limitations, for both he and she are co-heirs of the gift of eternal life. Husbands must not put themselves at the centre of existence, but remember that they are to serve and minister to their wives for the glory of God. Yes, he is the leader, but she with her physical and emotional limitations is just as vital and valuable to God's program.

'That your prayers be not hindered.' This is a consequence of not honouring the wife. 'Husbands surely have here cause to consider why their prayers are not answered.' (*Robertson's Word Pictures*)

In verses 8 to 15, there is painted a clear picture of a godly person's life and attitude; that is, how the man who has sanctified the Lord in his heart thinks and behaves.

(v. 8) This verse shows us the active, self-extending antidote to the tunnel-vision of selfishness. It is first and foremost a mindset: '...Be ye all of one mind...' We are not, then, simply trying to get the job done. We are to allow God to minister through us to others in the process, whether it be in the church, or in the home.

(v. 9) We are called to be a blessing, regardless of good or bad treatment by others. Our lives will be more truly blessed when we learn this, which is borne out in Peter's citation of a passage from the Psalms to follow.

(vv. 10-15) In verses 10 through 12, Peter is loosely quoting Psalm 34:12-16. Peter paints for us, in verses 8 through 15 what godliness under adversity looks like. The godly man is focused on being a blessing to others, and living a holy life. He consciously seeks to please the Lord, and is therefore indifferent to what men think.

(vv. 16-18) A righteous life is a testimony to the consciences of evil men. By submitting to God under persecution rather than to fleshly and revengeful impulses, we are following in the steps of Christ, who suffered injustice. Furthermore, Christ's death and resurrection has made provision for us to live in such a way, above all of the wrong-doings of humans toward us. The Holy Spirit raised Christ up to be

victorious over all angels, powers, and authorities (see verse 22). This same Holy Spirit rests upon a Christian when he is suffering for righteousness (see 4:14).

(vv. 19-22) Who these spirits in prison were, and for what reason Christ preached to them, and what their connection with Noah, I cannot tell. However, just as Noah's family, although Christians be few in number, God will certainly deliver them from this wicked world, as He delivered them. Christians shall be vindicated, as Noah was a last. And just as the flood waters lifted Noah far above the old race that rejected the truth, so a Christian's water baptism testifies that he has been lifted up triumphantly above the old race in Adam, and is seated with Christ in the Heavens, despite the threats of men and demons against him in the present. This reminds us of the words of the psalmist: '...The upright shall have dominion over them in the morning...' (Psalm 49:14)

Chapter 4: The Godly response to persecution

(vv. 1-5) Christ's purpose in suffering was to free us from our sin, therefore amidst the persecution we will receive from this world for being different, we must not capitulate to its evil ways. We must arm ourselves with this knowledge, for worldlings are often not content to defile themselves in sin, but would force the righteous to celebrate with them under pain of persecution for refusing. However, all give an account to God one day, whether the individuals be dead or alive at the time of reckoning.

(vv. 6-11) If a person repents and believes the Gospel before he dies, he will live eternally by the power of the Spirit (cross-reference with 3:18), regardless of what happens to him in this life. In the meantime, the duty of the Christian is to prepare for 'the end of all things'. With this note of urgency, Peter gives some particular instructions for how to do so:

- Keep a clear mind, and remain spiritually alert through prayer.
- Show hospitality without grumbling.
- Diligently minister to others according to your gifting.
- Spiritual teachers are to teach in accordance with God's Word, and according to the ability granted by the Spirit (not in the power of the flesh).

(v. 12) Believers are not to be surprised and disillusioned by their sufferings at the hands of others. The right response is rather to rejoice in the fact that their sufferings provide opportunity to identify with Christ, and for their faith to be found unto praise, honour, and glory when He appears (1:7). There is a deep satisfaction in suffering reproach for the name of Christ, for the Holy Spirit rests upon such. A Christian need not to be ashamed, but ought rather to give glory to God for such opportunities (Peter's own testimony was exemplary: Acts 5:41), knowing that such chastening is for our good (Hebrews 12), and that the end of our persecutors is a

fearful one (Proverbs 11:31). Like Jesus, we can commit the keeping of our souls at such times to the Father (2:23).

Chapter 5: Looking for the eternal glory to come

Peter's exhortation to elders portrays the pastor's role with the same sense of urgency conveyed in Ezekiel 34. That Old Testament Scripture conveys not only the gravity of a spiritual leader's responsibility, but also the heart of the Chief Shepherd, the Lord Himself.

(v. 1) No doubt, the pastors who led these local churches were most often older men, and neither is it any wonder, for spiritual maturity is needed in the ministerial office. For this reason, Peter calls them 'elders'. Peter mentions those credentials which qualify him to bring an exhortation, so that the pastors will give the more earnest heed to what he writes. His credentials:

- An elder: He is an aged pastor by this time.
- He was an eye-witness of Christ's sufferings at the cross. He had learned by example from the Master what it was to suffer, and to lay down his life for others.
- A partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Peter was persuaded of the truth and hope of the Gospel for himself, and he therefore expected his readers to receive his exhortation with all seriousness.

(v. 2) 'Feed the flock of God...' The Greek word translated 'feed' not only includes the idea of feeding, but of shepherding in general. As Hiebert explains, it necessarily includes the ideas of 'guiding and guarding, feeding and folding' (D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter*, p. 302).

Guiding: This must be done both at a public and a personal level, using the Word. The minister may occasionally blunder his grammar or his outline in the pulpit, and then kick himself for it, but does he care at all if he fails in genuinely pastoring God's people as individuals? He should, for the pulpit is not the be-all and end-all of ministry by any stretch of the imagination. The pastor must be willing to pursue the wayward sheep, seek out the hurting one, and to warn the lost.

A pastor must be able to resist gainsayers, and not suffer false teachers to perpetrate false doctrine among the people. He must at times be willing to give sharp rebuke to those who are contentious or dangerous. He must not suffer wolves to devour the flock. This is why he must be an avid student of the Word. Haphazard preparation for motivational messages that seem to stir the feelings will not safeguard the flock against error, let alone truly feed them.

Peter well remembers the time on the shores of Galilee when Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs...Feed my sheep.' ('Feed' in John 21 is the more precise Greek word for feeding) To take this work seriously requires no less than a genuine walk with God, and a single-minded seeking after His truth. If a preacher does not willingly digest and appropriate God's Word to himself, any accidental success will be *in spite* of his hypocrisy, not *because* of it.

'An English poet has sketched in a single line the portrait of a minister who is not what a minister ought to be: "The hungry sheep look up and are not fed."

'...While it is universally admitted that the minister must feed his people, it is surprising how little attention is paid by many a minister to the subject of nutrition and how little thought is given to the art of feeding. Much emphasis has been placed on the art of sermon writing: how to choose the text, how to unfold the idea, how to illustrate and adorn the truth, and how to perfect the argument. The world is hardly able to contain the books which have been written to tell ministers how to write sermons. But in many of these books the idea of feeding is not considered. The sermon is not looked upon as a form of food to be adapted to a particular appetite and to be made capable of assimilation by a particular stomach.

'...Sermons, rightly understood, are primarily forms of food. They are articles of diet. They are meals served by the minister for the sustenance of spiritual life' (Charles Jefferson, *The Minister as Shepherd*, pp. 60-62)

'...Which is among you...' implies that the shepherd is going to be acquainted as much as possible with the people. He himself is one of God's own sheep. He will not seek to be aloof, but will try to acquaint himself with their true state of affairs. Jim Berg points out that the first duty of compassion is to know a person's true condition (*Essential Virtues*, p. 183). Note this insightful comment from Charles Jefferson, in his book, *The Minister as Shepherd* (p. 79):

'[A true shepherd is]...one who goes where the sheep are, not with a grand declamation [formal or theatrical speech], but with a heart that loves and solaces and heals. He must live with the people, think with their mind, feel with their heart, see with their eyes, hear with their ears, suffer with their spirit. He must bear their griefs and carry their sorrows. He must be wounded for their transgressions and bruised for their iniquities. The chastisement of their peace must be upon him, and with his stripes they must be healed. They all like sheep have gone astray, and he must be willing to have laid on him the iniquity of them all. It is the sacrificial note in the ministry which is too often lacking in these latter days.'

A pastor ought to accept the oversight of God's people willingly, not because he has to, nor for money (filthy lucre), nor because it is expected of him, but because he is eager to do so. This ready mind (willingness) must come from a Spirit-filled life.

(v. 3) The pastor must not abuse his power, to force, dominate, or ride rough-shod over the people, which is the opposite of a shepherding mentality. He must lead them by word, yes, but not by driving them. He must rather patiently lead by example.

(v. 4) The under-shepherd's joy is to hear the voice of the Chief Shepherd, saying, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant.' The Lord Jesus shall truly honour the faithful pastor who has continually looked after those things that were Christ's, not minding his own pet interests. What is the crown? Is it a golden crown, or a wreath, or is it glory itself, which will crown his whole ministry? One thing is for sure: It will be glorious, for it will be administered by the Lord Himself. Paul said (in 2 Timothy 4:8), 'Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.'

(v. 5) A Christian's holiness is thoroughly tested by his submission to God-ordained authorities. The command to submit is implicit in a number of places throughout the book: 2:13-14, 17-18; 3:1; 5:2, 5-6. This command can only be obeyed by reverencing the Lord in our hearts (3:15). Christ's submission to the Father was honoured when the Father exalted him to a place of authority (3:22).

The work of the pastor is an act of submission to the Chief Shepherd, and so the word 'likewise' may be to show that there ought also to be a submissiveness on the part of those being shepherded, and in particular the young, who are prone to being wilful and rebellious. In this verse, the words 'younger' and 'elder' are both plural and masculine. Peter goes further to say that an attitude of submission ought to characterise all relationships in the church, regardless of age. This means allowing others' needs and interests to take precedence over our own (Philippians 2:3), as long as it is not sinful to do so. No doubt, Peter remembers the night when Jesus girded himself with a towel and washed the disciples' feet. To clothe oneself with humility implies a firm decision, and a continued attitude—a readiness of purpose to seek the needs of others first. To exalt and compare ourselves to one another and to kick up against our authorities will bring us into direct conflict with God.

(v. 6) Christians who suffer (even persecution) must remember that the same mighty hand of God which is humbling their pride through adversity will lift them up at the proper time, and that this lifting up will be all the greater if they submit themselves to God in the trial. This exaltation often happens in this life, but ultimately takes place when we reach Heaven's glory. So many Christians come into necessary hardships of various kinds, but do not heed the wise and loving counsel of those around them, or of their pastors, and end up becoming needlessly miserable, because they are proudly resisting God's purposes in their suffering (Matt 23:12).

(v. 7) Anxiety can be a natural outcome of persecution, but God calls us to remain stable by submitting to him in the midst of difficulty. Worry can be a huge hindrance to Godly submission. Therefore, worried Christians must surrender their worries to God, and not be driven on by fear. The only other place in the New Testament where the Greek word for 'cast' is used is to describe the action of throwing clothes on a colt. God calls suffering Christians to trust in His care and guidance for each step of their pathway. '...For he careth for you,' is true of all who are in Christ, and should be a huge encouragement to those of God's children who doubt His care.

(v. 8) Worry is only one of the advantages Satan can use against us. The Christian is commanded to sober (mentally unaffected) and wide awake. We are not to be distracted or asleep in this warfare. We may easily be distracted by fear, pleasure, or even care. When an animal is distracted, a roaring lion has a great advantage, because he roars and the animal flies into a panic, not knowing what to do. The Christian must be constantly watchful against Satan's devices, otherwise he will not know what to do when suddenly confronted by him.

(v. 9) One of Satan's key devices is to dislodge a Christian from the place of submission to God. The Christian must resist on this very front, and not be surprised at what lengths Satan will go to in order to persecute Christians. If others have suffered it, why may not we? If Christ suffered it, why may not we? The Christian who has learned to resist Satan at all times will not be so surprised when the assault looks most ugly and terrifying, because he has already learned warfare.

(v. 10) This verse dawns as a morning sun upon a bleak and agonising night. God's grace is sufficient to carry a man in Christ through all of his sufferings toward the eternal glory, and to accomplish four things in the believer's life, ultimately consummated in glory:

- 1) To make him perfect: Fit, repair, restore the believer...That is, from the wreckage of sin.
- 2) To stablish him: To steadfastly set him in a certain direction.
- 3) To strengthen him
- 4) To settle him: To consolidate and ground him in a certain fixed position.

Thus, we see that the Christian is not only kept by the power of God, but strengthened through the very things that one might think would destroy him. This is God's sure work, and we must cooperate with it.

(v. 11) The Christian, with Peter, sees that the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, and the majesty belong to God, and can therefore look through a transient and troubled life to the eternal glory to come.

(vv. 12-) Silas was either the bearer or the amanuensis of the epistle, or both. Harking back to the first chapter, Peter enunciates that one of his main purposes for writing was to strengthen their faith in the hope of the Gospel. Babylon may have been literal Babylon, or it may have been a cryptic way of identifying Rome. Marcus is probably John Mark, Barnabas' nephew, and the writer of the gospel of Mark. Peter may have won him to the Lord, explaining the term 'son'. Once again, Peter calls them to express their love to one another, even while the fires of affliction troubled them from without. Peter's final benediction of peace is an expression of the brotherly love that held the church so close together in a world that was not worthy of them.



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BAPTIST CHURCH

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