

1 Peter

Sermon preached by Phil Kayser at DCC on 2021-01-17

Introduction - controversies often uncover keys

When I have asked friends in China, India, and other repressive countries what their favorite book of the Bible is, often they have said that it is 1 Peter. When they read this book they realize that God knows what they are going through, cares that they are suffering, enters into their suffering, and helps them to find joy in their suffering. Frequently they will memorize this book and meditate deeply on it. The Psalms are also a favorite book of the persecuted church for the same reason. Both of those books give them a theology of suffering - a very *practical* theology of suffering. I hope I can at least introduce you to that theology of suffering this morning. But they find it strange that American Christians don't have a theology of suffering. In fact, one pastor in China told me that the church there has been praying that American Christians will find persecution so that the church here would be purified. They are very worried about us. It's an interesting perspective. God may be answering their prayers. In any case, this is a book that gives us a comprehensive theology of suffering.

I wish I could dive straight into it, but sadly I do need to clear up some controversies. If you land on the wrong side of these controversies, wrong presuppositions can easily obscure the meaning of the book. And the three controversies are it's date, its audience, and where Peter wrote this book from. Let's take those in reverse order.

1 Peter 5:13 shows us the location that he wrote from. It says, "She who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you, and so does Mark my son." It appears that Peter was writing from a city that he calls Babylon. And if we are take the clues in the text seriously, there is a literal woman and Mark who live there. The problem is, the literal city of Babylon had long ago ceased to exist. So which Babylon is he referring to? There have been basically four interpretations: (1) The first theory is that this may be a reference to a temporary Roman military outpost that at least one soldier dubbed as Babylon that was built near old Cairo in Egypt; (2) Second, a minority in the past have thought it might be the ancient literal city of Babylon in Mesopotamia (and some have thought, well maybe Peter was hiding in the ruins); (3) Third, some have thought that it is simply a symbolic use of the name and that it refers to first-century city of Rome; and (4) fourth, some have thought that it was a symbol for the first-century city of Jerusalem.

The first interpretation has been adequately debunked by most scholars. What would Peter be doing in a tiny military outpost with a woman and Mark? And that tiny military outpost in Egypt would not have been known very widely by that name. And third, there is absolutely no evidence that either Peter or Christians resided there. Quite the contrary.

The second interpretation is also impossible as the original Babylon had been reduced to rubble long before Peter. No one lived there. And Peter was not the type of person to hide from persecution where no people were. And keep in mind that a woman and Mark are there too.

The third option *is* a possibility. It's actually the majority opinion. Most study bibles take this view. I don't, but it is a respectable view. And it is true that there is a little bit of post-AD 70 evidence that a couple of Jews referred to Rome with the symbolic name of "Babylon" precisely because Rome conquered Jerusalem like Babylon did. However, there is no evidence that Rome was ever referred to as Babylon prior to AD 70, and this was clearly written prior to AD 70. And Jerusalem had not yet been destroyed by Rome. And there is a lot of other evidence against Rome being this symbolic Babylon.

It is my contention (and the contention of a growing list of scholars) that the name "Babylon" was used by Peter as a symbol of Jerusalem under imminent judgment. Let's look at the evidence:

First, in our studies in the book of Revelation we saw that there were 22 points of identity between the great city Babylon in that book and the great city of Jerusalem in that book. The two are one and the same. The "great city" has a consistent meaning in that book. I'll only look at one of those 22 points. Revelation 11:8 (the first reference to it in that book), defines what it means by that term. It says about the last two prophets: "And their bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified" (Rev. 11:8). He clearly identifies the great city of Babylon as Jerusalem. It's being symbolically called Egypt, Sodom, and Babylon - all three symbols representing judgment.

Second, 1 Peter treats Jerusalem as Egypt just as Revelation does.

Third, Galatians 2:9 says that Peter and John were commissioned by Christ to be apostles to the circumcision and Paul to the Gentiles. Peter didn't abandon that calling. To the day of his death he continued to be an apostle to the circumcision. And that relates to the second controversy too, but I won't deal with that now.

Fourth, the book of Acts consistently shows Peter as living in Jerusalem and even on his trips, returning to Jerusalem as his base of operations.

Fifth, Acts 12:12 says that both Mark and Mary also had their residence in Jerusalem. They both stayed in the same house. Yes they went on trips, but they had a home base in Jerusalem. Well, 1 Peter 5:13 says that Mark was with Peter and some well-known woman connected with Mark. Well, Acts says both lived in the same house. If Mary's house was in Jerusalem in AD 65, and if Mark lived with Mary, this is an added proof that Babylon may indeed be a symbol of Jerusalem under imminent judgment.

Fifth Galatians connects Peter, James and John with Jerusalem and contrasts their commission as being to the Jews and Paul's to the Gentiles. 1:18 says that Paul "went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days." Fourteen years later (in Galatians 2:1-10) it says that Paul returned to Jerusalem to meet with "James, Cephas and

John.” Cephas is another name for Peter. So repeatedly James, Peter, and John are associated with Jerusalem, and all three had a special calling to minister to the Jews.

Sixth, in 1 Peter 1:1, Peter writes to those who have been scattered, but Peter himself was not scattered. If he was in Rome, he too would have been one of the scattered ones. This implies that he is still in Jerusalem.

Seventh, if Peter and Mark were residents of Rome as so many people insist, then why do neither of their names appear on the extensive list of people being greeted in Romans 16:1-16? That would be a major oversight. And if he is not in Rome, then Jerusalem is the *only* other possible candidate for this symbolic name. And people object, but Peter was martyred in Rome. Yes, a couple of church fathers say that, but other church fathers say that he was martyred in Jerusalem. The evidence from the church fathers is not conclusive. So we are stuck with the Scriptural evidence. And the Scriptural evidence favors Jerusalem.

Eighth, if (as in Revelation) these scattered Jewish Christians were being persecuted by Jews, and if this was written around the same time that Revelation was, then it makes sense that these two apostles to the Jews would speak of their persecutors as being the leadership of Israel and as being a city doomed to judgment just as Babylon was. It was a word of encouragement.

So, even though I can't be dogmatic on this, I believe that Peter is using the symbol of Babylon in exactly the same way that the apostle John did. Almost everybody agrees that the name Babylon must be a symbolic name. But there is far more evidence that the symbol was being applied to Jerusalem rather than to Rome.

But that brings me to the second controversy with this book. Many commentaries and study bibles insist that 1 and 2 Peter were both written to Gentiles, and not to Jews and that this exclusively Gentile church is called Israel. They use this to teach what is known as replacement theology or supersessionism. I disagree. The church didn't replace Israel. The church *was* Israel. There is a big difference between those two statements. The church started with the remnant of Israel in Acts 1-2, grew into a huge church composed 100% of Jews from every tribe, and only later had Gentiles grafted into Israel. God has not had two bodies - one Israel and the other the church. There has always been one body, one people of God, one Olive Tree, one vineyard, and one kingdom. Here's the irony - both Dispensationalism and its polar opposite (Replacement Theology) act as if God has had two peoples - one being Israel and the other being the church.

So, to summarize, it is my view that Peter was writing from Jerusalem. I agree with some of the early church fathers who state that Peter died in Jerusalem, not Rome. He was not the first pope of Rome, as Roman Catholics claim. And I agree that Peter's charge continued to be to win Jews to Christ until his death. Those who were scattered were largely Jewish Christians. Here are some clues that Peter was writing to Jewish Christians and not to an *exclusively* Gentile audience:

Clue 1. Chapter 1:1 says, "To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." The Greek word for "pilgrim" is *παρεπιδήμοις*, and is defined by the dictionary as referring to refugees from one area to a land where they are not natives. If

they are pilgrims in Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, then they are not Galatians, Cappadocians, etc. They are from somewhere else.

Clue 2. The same verse refers to them as “the Dispersion,” a term that is exclusively used of Jewish refugees elsewhere in the ancient literature. It is the Greek word διασποράς.

Clue 3. Chapter 1:12 says that these Christians had the Holy Spirit poured out upon them at Pentecost. Well, who had the Holy Spirit poured out upon them at Pentecost? Not a single Gentile was there. It was Jews from every nation and language who had traveled to Jerusalem to be part of the a Jewish festival of Pentecost. And of course, the same countries mentioned here are mentioned in Acts 2. They were Jews who had become Christians in Acts 2.

Clue 4. Chapter 1:18 says that they had “aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers.” This is parallel to Paul’s writing about the aimless traditions of the Jewish fathers.

Clue 5. Chapter 2:5-10 may at first seem like it is referring to Gentiles since it says that they were once not a people but are now the people of God. But it is my opinion that this verse is actually a rock-solid proof of the opposite. It is quoting from Hosea 1:6-7, which says that Jews who are not believers are “Lo-Ammi, for you are not my people and I will not be your God.” Hosea says that it is not until the Jews have faith in Him that they can be counted His people. So in terms of the original intent of Hosea which was explicitly spoken to Jews, these have to have been Jews who became Christians. A Gentile audience does not fit Hosea 1:6-7.

Clue 6. Chapter 2:11 refers to them as sojourners and pilgrims. While that could refer to a spiritual condition, it is used elsewhere of the Christians scattered out of Jerusalem in Acts chapter 8. It’s the same language.

Clue 7. Chapter 2:12 commands them to be “having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles...” That implies that the Gentiles are different group than them. Now, it is true that Peter could be using the term “Gentiles” as a synonym for any unbelievers, but that is assuming what needs to be proved. When the Bible elsewhere uses the term “Gentiles” to distinguish Jews from the other nations (and “nations” is another translation for Gentiles), it seems simpler to assume things haven’t changed here. Now obviously, when a Gentile gets converted and joins the church, he is treated by God as being a part of Israel - just like they would have been in the Old Testament. But it is Israel they are joining, not a non-Israel.

Clue 8. Chapter 2:25 speaks of them as sheep having gone astray, not as goats. And they have *returned* to the Shepherd rather than coming to Him for the *first* time. Though not conclusive, that phrase speaks much more naturally of Jews who came back to the faith.

Clue 9. While chapter 4:3 is used as a slam dunk proof of a Gentile audience, it actually speaks against it being a Gentile audience when you dig deeper. And a lot of it is based on how you translate it. But even the way the New King James translates it, it still does not necessitate a Gentile audience. It says, “For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles - when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries,

drinking parties, and abominable idolatries.” Notice that Peter uses the word “we.” Peter was not a Gentile. If that verse proves that the audience was Gentile, it proves that Peter was a Gentile. And then (based on this translation) it means that both he and them did the will of the Gentiles did - engaging in sexual perversity, drunkenness, and idolatry (something not true of Peter). But even there, the Gentiles are spoken of as being different than them. And that is reinforced in verse 4: “In regard to these, *they* think it strange that you do not run with *them* in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.” The “they” refers to the Gentiles, and again they are distinguished.

Let me read the same two verses from the ESV:

For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. 4 With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you;

It doesn't say that they engaged in these things. It is doubtful that Peter did. Either way, Peter is not a Gentile.

I won't bore you with all of the other evidence. I think the truth is somewhere between the extremes of Dispensationalism and Amillennial Replacement Theology. Yes, the church is Israel, and yes Gentile Christians were grafted into Israel, but the evidence seems to point to the fact that Peter is writing to a predominantly Jewish audience that had been driven out of Jerusalem. He knew these people. Peter determined to stay in Jerusalem and was martyred shortly after he wrote 2 Peter.

1 Peter was written in late AD 65. 2 Peter was written a few months later - just before the book of Revelation was written - in early AD 66. Rome had authorized Jews to hunt down Christians and to destroy the church. Nothing but a remnant were left in the area of Palestine, and the bulk of the church in Israel had been scattered to the winds. And even there they faced enormous persecution from both the Jews and the Romans - a persecution that we well-documented in our study of Revelation. This book was written to help Christians learn how to face persecution as Christ called us to. So let's take a whirlwind overview of the book to see how.

Overview of the book

Your identity helps you face suffering (1:1-2)

As usual, introductions are never throw-away comments in the Bible. Peter starts by identifying himself as “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.” He will later model his own role as an elder as well, but Peter wants them to know that these words come straight from Jesus. What Peter says Christ says. Apostles are just spokespeople for Christ. And it is Christ who cares that they are suffering.

But it is especially in the next two verses that the readers will find comfort. Though the Jews and Gentiles hate them and have been persecuting them and treating them as the offscouring of the earth, Peter walks them through the three identities that they have.

First, there is a social identity that is seen in the word “pilgrims” or as the margin says, “sojourners.” The word just means aliens. Like Abraham of old, they were pilgrims who didn’t really belong anywhere. They were kicked out of Israel but aren’t accepted in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, or Bithynia. One day the church will possess the earth like the Joshua generation did, and the land will be ours. We will no longer be aliens or pilgrims because Christians *will* inherit the earth. But until Christians take over, we are all pilgrims. So in that sense we stand in good company with the fathers of Israel - none of whom had *yet* inherited the land that had been promised to them.

Second, comes their political identity. They are called “the Dispersion.” This is a technical word for Jews who had been dispossessed by political exile. Like Daniel, Shadrack, Mesheck, and Abednego, they have been dispersed among the Gentiles. And also like them, this also gives them an opportunity to reach the world. He is going to be showing each of us how to thrive as pilgrims wherever the Lord has placed us.

But their third identity is their spiritual identity. In verse 2 they are called the elect, or the chosen of God. The world has rejected them, but what counts is that God has chosen them. Yes, you *do* belong. You belong to *God*.

The world hates them, but they are said in the next words to be elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. Foreknowledge is not simply God having a plan, though He does have a plan for each of us. But this is the same word used for knowing your wife. It is sometimes translated as foreloved. They may feel like orphans, but they are loved with an eternal love by the true Father.

The next comfort is that, though the world rejects them, the Holy Spirit sets them apart (or sanctifies them) to Himself. Sanctification is the opposite of rejection. It’s a great word to meditate on when you feel lonely and rejected. God has sanctified you to Himself; pulled you to Himself.

Next, though they are treated like dirt, Christ cleanses them with His precious blood. He treats them as clean, attractive, and lovely.

So each word in this introduction would have been incredibly comforting to these persecuted exiles. And when you are persecuted, this is a book to cherish. Sadly, we won’t be able to look at every word like I just did in the introduction. Instead, I’ll give you a high level overview.

God’s future for you helps you to face suffering (1:3-12)

In verses 3-12 Peter basically says that though they don’t know what their future will hold with the world, they can bank on the fact that they have an eternal future that is absolutely secure. Verse 3 says they have a living hope. Verse 4 says they have an inheritance that can’t be spoiled or taken away. It’s reserved in heaven for them. Verse 5 says that they are being kept by the very power of God for deliverance that is about to be revealed in the last time - and it was the last time. Time was running out for Israel and for Nero, and the Great Wrath was about to be poured out upon the empire to vindicate God’s elect.

But nothing was wasted in this persecution. Things were not out of control. God allowed it to purify the church. He says in verses 6-9

1Pet. 1:6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, 8 whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.

The persecutors may be able to kill the body, but they cannot kill the soul. And Christ was about to come to render judgment upon Jew and Gentile alike. He was not an absentee landlord. He was the God of an incredible salvation that was soon to begin taking over the world. But the point of that whole section is that knowing God's future for us in heaven can help any of us to face persecution with confidence and even with rejoicing. The more you meditate on each word of this book, the more likely you will be able to be pulled out of negative and destructive emotions into the supernatural fruit of the Spirit.

It is in the context of suffering that the supernatural character of holiness really shines (1:13-2:10)

The next major section (chapter 1:13 to chapter 2:10) shows how suffering cannot rob us of what is really important. The overarching lesson of this section is fantastic as well. It is in the context of suffering that the supernatural character of our new life really shines through. So in some respects, what Peter is pointing to is very similar to what Christ pointed to in the Sermon on the Mount. It's in the dark times that the light of God's supernatural grace really shines through us. I'll just give you a few hints.

Hope when everything around us seems hopeless (v. 13)

The first thing that really stands out in relief against the blackness of the times is that these Christians did not lose hope. They evidenced the supernatural because they had hope when everything around them seemed hopeless. That's remarkable. He told them in verse 13 - "rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ..." Grace is given to us at the start our Christian walk, it under-girds our walk, and it finishes our walk in glory. Nothing could rob them of their hope of heaven and eternal joy unless they let that hope get robbed. And that's why he begins by saying, "Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober..." The image of girding up the loins is taken from battle when the soldiers would tie their robes up above their knees to keep their legs from getting tangled and to enable to them to run and fight. It kind of looked like shorts when the robes were girded up. And girding up the loins of the mind means to prepare ourselves mentally so that we aren't robbed of the supernatural hope that sustains us. I've seen two reactions to persecution - despair on the one hand and confident hope. It depends on where your focus is.

Pursuing holiness when everyone thinks that is weird (vv. 14-16)

The next thing that really makes true Christians stand out as different is that these people did not conform to the world; they sought to be holy. And this holiness proved that they

were children. Why? Because children take on the characteristics of their parents. Christians take on the holiness of their heavenly Father. Not even persecution can rob them of the Father's likeness - unless we lack faith and let them rob us. So verses 14-16 say,

14 as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; 15 but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

Just as a side-note. Persecution exposed the tares in the early church. And Jesus and the apostles warned that this would happen - that there would be a false church and true church emerging side-by-side. At the very time that true Christians were growing in holiness, the false church was growing in wickedness. And Peter's next epistle will draw that out rather clearly. And the point is that God often uses persecution to purify the church and to expose false believers. He did so in Ethiopia where I grew up. He did so in China under the persecutions of Mao and is doing so once again under the current persecutions that are heating up there. Christ-likeness especially shines during the dark times of life. And its good to be reminded of this benefit of suffering. Nothing is wasted in God's economy.

Fearing God when everyone else is growing in their fear of man (vv. 17-21)

Yet another evidence that these Christians were born from above and have something supernatural about them is that they kept growing in their fear of God under persecution even while others were growing in their fear of man. All around them people were being rounded up and interrogated to see if they were Christians. It made false believers focus on man and fear man. But it made true believers be more and more cast upon God. Verses 17-21.

1Pet. 1:17 And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; 18 knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. 20 He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you 21 who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Fear of God makes our focus on God and His grace, not on us and our works. The more things are taken away from us by our persecutors, the more we begin to value God, and His redemption, and His gift of Jesus. We have riches that no one can take away.

Persecution highlights the supernatural love of the brethren (vv. 22-25)

The next thing that Peter says was highlighted in these Christians was the supernatural love that they had for each other. Fake love would fail them under persecution, but sincere God-given love would not. Fake love would leave them open to compromise, whereas sincere love would purify their hearts. Fake love would stop loving when the cost was too high whereas sincere love would endure through every trial. So again, persecution makes the supernatural shine forth in God's people and exposes the counterfeit in others. Verses 22-25:

1Pet. 1:22 Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, 23 having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, 24 because “All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away, 25 But the word of the LORD endures forever.” Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.

Peter says that it is inconceivable that a truly born again person can fail to love the brethren. And the division between fake love and true love becomes more and more pronounced the more intense the suffering is. Two weeks ago Kathy and I watched the biographical movie of Richard Wurmbrand, *Tortured For Christ*. And you could see the sifting among professing believers. You could also see the supernatural way that love for God’s enemies grew under persecution. In fact, at one point, his torturer, who had been trying to get Richard to quit praying, became extremely angry and frustrated that his tortures had not worked. He saw Richard praying again. And after railing on him, asked Richard what he was praying for. Richard said, “I have been praying for you.” And the guard was dumbfounded that a tortured Christian would be praying God’s love to save the torturer. The supernatural shines in so many ways under persecution.

Considering ourselves privileged when others pity us (2:1-10)

I was reading the first century description of the torture and persecution of Christians by Nero written by the Roman historian Tacitus. He was a pagan, and he couldn’t understand why Christians wouldn’t give up their ideas in order to live. He felt sorry for them. And other pagans were surprised that Christians didn’t feel sorry for themselves. In the midst of their persecution they had something that no one else had. They saw themselves as privileged to be Christians and privileged to suffer for Christ. What on earth possessed them? Well, it was the Holy Spirit who possessed them and filled them with joy. In chapter 2:1-10 we see the incredible privileges that we really do have. Look at the images of our identity and our privilege.

We are children of God (vv. 1-3)

First, we are children of God. Chapter 2:1-3.

1Pet. 2:1 Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, 2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

When you know that you are God’s child, you are more interested in His favor than the world’s favor. And how do we know we are Christians? One of the indications is that we will hunger for Bible just like newborn babies hunger for milk. What can get in the way of that hunger? The verses indicate that malice, deceit, hypocrisy, and envy can spoil our spiritual appetite just as sickness can take away a baby’s hunger. So we do need to put those poisons away. But when we realize our incredible privilege of being *His* children, it can help us to face our persecutors.

Like the suffering Christ, who was chosen and precious (v. 4)

Second, by suffering, we are identifying with Jesus. Verse 4 says,

1Pet. 2:4 Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious,

The fact that Jesus was rejected by men does not mean that God rejected Him. Instead, Jesus was chosen by God and precious - even during His suffering. Well, logically that means we should not conclude that God hates us when we suffer. Instead, these verses indicate that we are identified as chosen and precious when we are privileged to suffer like Christ did. That verse removes the doubts that Satan throws at the persecuted. The whole book is a tightly knit argument to help Christians stand up during persecution. It's hard to do the book justice in one sermon, but it is a tightly knit book.

Though stones rejected by God, we are used by God to build a temple (vv. 4-8)

Next, Peter amplifies on Christ being a stone and us being living stones to make the point that though the world rejected the cornerstone (Jesus) and though they reject the building stones (us), they can't stop God building His temple. But there is comfort in knowing that if they persecuted Jesus (the cornerstone) we ought not to be surprised when they persecute us (the living stones). Verses 4-8.

1Pet. 2:4 Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.">

1Pet. 2:7 Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone," 8 and "A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense." They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.

This helps the persecuted Christians to have a Christ-centered perspective on persecution. It's just a tiny part in the massive theology of suffering that the modern church desperately needs to know.

The new Israel (vv. 9-10)

The last thing that shines through so strongly in this section is that the church really was the Israel of God. Why does he bother making this argument? Well, who were their persecutors? It was primarily the Jews. A lot of preachers don't get that connection. In our Revelation study we saw that even Nero's persecution was egged on by his Jewish wife and all his Jewish advisors in the court. The leaders in Israel had entered into a seven-year covenant with Nero to exterminate the church. It was primarily a Jewish persecution.

So, since they were being persecuted by the false Israel, Peter comforts them by assuring them that God considers them to be the true Israel. This makes Hosea, Ezekiel and so many Old Testament books open up and be applicable to them. The church is Israel. And in verses 9-10 God defines them as the New Israel by applying the images that were exclusively used of Israel in the Old Testament to the church, and by quoting the passage from Hosea that showed the church to be the remnant of Israel and false Israel to not be God's people at all.

1Pet. 2:9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

All of this shows how persecution reveals the false church to be false and the true church to be true and to be characterized by supernatural grace. Persecution is not an evidence of abandonment. Quite the opposite.

It is in the context of suffering that we have the greatest testimony (2:11-3:12)

Moving on to the next section. Peter shows another way to make the kingdom shine and win others to Christ as a result of a true testimony. This whole section deals with the advancement of the kingdom through our testimony. Persecution can never stop the advancement of the church. He says that we have the greatest opportunity to give a testimony during the dark times of suffering. Those are the times that the church grows like crazy. As Christ showed in the Sermon on the Mount, it is in the situations where you can do what no unbeliever can do that they begin to covet what you have. They wish they had your peace, love, boldness, patience, and other graces. But the only way they can have what they admire in you is by bending the knee to King Jesus and being filled with His Spirit. So let's look at these amazing testimonies that show this.

Testimony to the world (2:11-12)

Verses 11-12 speak of being a testimony to the world.

1Pet. 2:11 Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, 12 having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

God wants us to showcase grace when we are persecuted, not compromise.

Testimony to the state (2:13-17)

Peter then expands upon this in verses 13-17 by showing that we can be a tremendous testimony to the state or a lousy testimony to the state. It all depends upon whether we handle persecution in our own fleshly strength or with God's supernatural strength.

1Pet. 2:13 Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, 14 or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. 15 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men— 16 as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. 17 Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

Testimony to employers (2:18-25)

In verses 18-25 he says that we can be a tremendous testimony to employers who mistreat us as Christians. And we are beginning to see employer persecution heat up in America. By the way, this is a particularly convicting passage for people who constantly grumble about

their employers. Peter says that that is a lousy testimony. Let's read it without comment and ask the Spirit to apply it to our hearts. What kind of a testimony do we showcase to our employers who don't treat us right? Beginning at verse 18:

1Pet. 2:18 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. 19 For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. 20 For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. 21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 22 "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth"; 23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. 25 For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Testimony to unbelieving husbands (3:1-6)

Then in chapter 3:1-6, Peter calls Christian wives to be a testimony to their unbelieving husbands. It's a tough role to be in, yet Peter indicates that God's grace can enable them to showcase the character of Christ even in those less-than-ideal marriages. Let's read chapter 3:1-6.

1Pet. 3:1 Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, 2 when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. 3 Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel— 4 rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. 5 For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, 6 as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.

Though this passage has been abused by hyper-patriarchalists, I would point out that it actually stands against that position on several counts. You don't have to showcase God's grace to blindly submit in a servile way. You just have to give up to do that. What Peter is calling for is a strong submission - so strong that it requires supernatural grace that is a testimony. Let's illustrate the supernatural by looking at six ways that the hyperpatriarchalist's interpretation is wrong.

First, the "likewise" in verse 1 compares the submission of the wife to the submissions in the previous chapter, and the previous chapter allowed a Peter and John to tell civil authorities that they could not forbid what God commanded and vice versa. Yet they did it graciously. It also compares a wife's submission to the submission that Jesus gives to the Father in all things. This is a supernaturally wrought submission that would blow an unbelieving husband away. It's not just passively going along to get along.

Second, Peter addressed the wives, not the husbands. This means that the wives had the ability to have independent thinking. After all, she has completely rejected the pagan worldview of her husband and she has embraced the Bible. That does not sound to me like she is treating her husband's voice as the voice of Christ. Yet her independent thinking is still consistent with a radical submission to her husband. And it showcases the

supernatural because it means that she submits even when she is smarter than the husband. It's not turning off the mind. It's precisely because her mind is so captured by Christ that she is a testimony that can win him to the Gospel - through godly submission.

And that's the third difference. Her submission did not mean that she could not try to win her husband to a different viewpoint than he currently had. Such a viewpoint is a misunderstanding of the text. Verse 1 says, "that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, *may be won* by the conduct of their wives." Peter wants them to win their husbands to the Gospel - to be sure, without nagging (which tends to be some women's besetting sin), but it is clear that she shared the Gospel. They have obviously told their husbands about the Word of God and the husbands have rejected it. So then they stop speaking. They don't nag. Nagging is trusting yourself rather than trusting God. Nagging is an evidence of lack of faith.

Fourth, their submission did not mean going along with sin, since verse 2 commanded these believing wives to maintain chaste conduct. And it takes the Holy Spirit's wisdom within these women to navigate such a husband's vascillating desires, and still engage in such submission.

Fifth, submission does not mean being fearful or timid according to verse 6. No, they have the boldness of the Holy Spirit. That's what makes the submission such a testimony. It's totally different than the servile fearful submission of pagan wives.

And finally, their submission did not do away with equality in Christ according to verse 7. And again, that makes the submission remarkable.

Testimony to wives (3:7)

He moves on to encouraging husbands to be a godly testimony to their wives in verse 7. Yes, you husbands are also a testimony - either a good testimony or a bad testimony to your wives. And every word in that verse could have a similar exposition that shows that this is not just any kind of leadership. This is a gracious leadership wrought by the power of the Holy Spirit that is considerate, understanding, and caring.

Testimony to all (3:8-12)

And he calls them to be a godly testimony to *all* in verses 8-12. When you can do the things in those verses, you showcase that your life is a supernatural life that is different than the life of fake Christians. It is a grace that enables you to love life even when others make you suffer. Let me actually start with verse 7, since I didn't read that.

1Pet. 3:7 Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.>

1Pet. 3:8 Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; 9 not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. 10 For "He who would love life And see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit. 11 Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it. 12 For the eyes of the LORD are on

the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.”

Even under suffering we should be ready to serve (3:13-4:11)

The next section shows another way in which we can shine as being quite different from the world. Peter calls upon us to be ready to serve even when we suffer. Who wants to serve those who cause their own suffering? It seems strange to the world. Yet it is an incredible testimony to our persecutors that we can serve them and love them and try to win them to the Gospel even when they have tortured us. It's not being overcome by evil, but overcoming evil with good.

With a confident apologetics (3:13-22)

Just like the pre-existent Christ preached through Noah to the pre-flood people and was a testimony that condemned them to suffer in Hades (that's the way I interpret verses 18-22), we can have a powerful and confident witness if our conduct matches our words. I won't read the whole section, but look at verses 13-17.

1Pet. 3:13 And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? 14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled." 15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; 16 having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. 17 For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

With a confident conduct (4:1-6)

So they served with a confident apologetics. They also served with a confident conduct in chapter 4:1-6. I remember talking to a Christian who had been in and out of jail for his faith. He said that he had previously been somewhat afraid of offending authorities before his first jail sentence because he didn't want to have a criminal record, but once he had a record, he had no reputation to protect and preaching Christ was easy. Compromise was not as much of a temptation anymore. And boldness for Christ seemed natural. Well, Peter testifies to much the same confidence that persecution gave to these Christians. It made them no longer dependent on man-pleasing.

1Pet. 4:1 Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 2 that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. 3 For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. 4 In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. 5 They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 6 For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

With a confident ministry (4:7-11)

The last part of this section shows that since the end of their persecutors and of all of Judaism was at hand, they could have a confident ministry. Jewish persecution would not triumph. Christ's kingdom would triumph. He says in verses 7-11.

1Pet. 4:7 But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. 8 And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins." 9 Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. 10 As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 11 If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

How to face suffering with joy (4:12-5:11)

But now Peter gets to the heart of his sermon. He gives them several additional points that will help them to face suffering with joy. It may seem like joy and suffering don't fit together, but if you have the Holy Spirit inside you, they do. This is not a grin and bear it Christianity. This is a supernatural Christianity that can experience supernatural joy even in the midst of suffering. And we are more likely to enter that joy if we put each of these attitudes and actions on. I'll quickly go through them.

Don't be surprised by suffering (4:12)

The first thing that helps you not to become bitter over suffering is to expect it. Verse 12 says,

1Pet. 4:12 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you;

After all, Jesus had promised suffering for those who were righteous. Paul had promised tribulation for those who were righteous. It was not an unexpected thing. And if you expect it, you will be more likely to face it in a godly way. But if you have a name-it-and-claim-it prosperity Gospel where the only promise is wealth, health, and peace to those who have faith, you will be crushed when none of that happens; you'll be disappointed and disillusioned. So expect it as a natural outcome of antithesis.

See Christ in your sufferings (4:13-14)

Second, he told them to see *Christ* in their sufferings. Verses 13-14.

13 but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. 14 If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.

If Christ and His Spirit are inside you, then the demonic world that hates Christ and the Spirit will persecute you just like they persecuted Jesus on earth. If you see Christ in your sufferings, you will be buoyed with the realization that you are not forsaken. What did Jesus say to Paul when Paul was persecuting the church? He said, "Saul, Saul, why are you

persecuting Me?” It helps us to have joy if we realize that Christ suffers when we suffer. He identifies with us in our sufferings. So see Christ in your sufferings.

Distinguish persecution from the consequences of bad attitudes (4:15-19)

Thirdly, distinguish true persecution from the natural consequences of having bad attitudes; of being a jerk. Verses 15-19 say,

15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. 16 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.

1Pet. 4:17 For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 Now “If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?” 19 Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.

Suffering because you have been a jerk has no reward. But suffering because you are faithful to Christ has eternal rewards that no one can rob from you. In fact, the early church was so convinced of the rewards that martyrs would have that many longed for martyrdom and were disappointed when they were not martyred. But even though that might be going overboard, realize that everyone will suffer. The non-elect will suffer throughout eternity. We only suffer for a short period and will experience everlasting joy. Just knowing that helps us face suffering better.

Be a part of the church's shepherding ministry (5:1-4)

Another thing that can help us to face persecution successfully is to not neglect the church, but to be part of the church's shepherding ministry. Many in the early church tried to be secret believers and to avoid membership in the church where they might be caught and get in trouble. He addresses them in later verses. But chapter 5:1-4 calls upon the elders not to bail in order to save their hides. Even though being an elder brings extra risks, it is an absolutely essential role.

1Pet. 5:1 The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: 2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; 3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; 4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

Put on humility and trust God's care (5:5-7)

There are three more points Peter presses home that will help believers to face persecution successfully. One is to put on humility. One expression of humility is a willingness to submit to God's representatives (the elders). The church was intended to be a hospital to which the persecuted soldiers could repair and find comfort. So verses 5-7 says,

1Pet. 5:5 Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.” 6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, 7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

Engage in spiritual warfare (5:8-9)

The next admonition was to realize that all of this persecution of Jewish leaders and Romans under Nero was really being driven by the demonic, and it is imperative that we learn how to engage in spiritual warfare - the theme of our teaching for this year. Verses 8-9.

1Pet. 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 9 Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.

Do all to God's glory (5:10-11)

And the final secret to successfully facing persecution was to do all to the glory of God. If you are doing all to your own glory, you will have constant disappointments in life. But if you are doing all to God's glory, then persecution can't rob you of your joy. Only you can let your joy be robbed. Verses 10-11 say,

10 But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. 11 To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Concluding remarks on fellowship (5:12-14)

And then comes the conclusion. The conclusion to the epistle does not constitute throw-away words either. They showed that Peter, Silvanus, Mary, Mark, and others cared very deeply for them in their homelessness and in their wanderings.

1Pet. 5:12 By Silvanus, our faithful brother as I consider him, I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God in which you stand.>

1Pet. 5:13 She who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you; and so does Mark my son. 14 Greet one another with a kiss of love.>

Peace to you all who are in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Brothers and sisters. It is very likely that we will face some degree of persecution in the coming years. Hold 1 Peter as a gift from God that will sustain you during that persecution. And may God keep each of us faithful and joyful. Amen.