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BETWEEN THE TIMES: PREACHING 1 PETER  
TO VALLEY BAPTIST CHURCH  
IN APPLETON, WISCONSIN

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A Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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by  
Jonathan Scott Juedes  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

BETWEEN THE TIMES: PREACHING 1 PETER  
TO VALLEY BAPTIST CHURCH  
IN APPLETON, WISCONSIN

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For persecuted Christians

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BDAG	Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, eds. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000
LXX	Septuagint
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament

## PREFACE

Doctoral studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary have ministered to my mind and heart in lasting ways. I would not have completed my studies without my family's love and the encouragement of many classmates, friends, mentors, church members, and faculty. Specifically, I want to thank my amazing wife, Colleen, and my children, Jack, Ella, Quinn, Ivy, Arthur, and Anne. I will always cherish the memories of our trips to Louisville together. I am also grateful to Valley Baptist Church for providing me with the resources and time to further my education. I would be remiss if I did not mention my indebtedness to the SBTS Writing Center Mentors, whose feedback improved and sharpened my writing. Finally, I am grateful to Dr. Chase Sears and Dr. Bill Cook for their supervision and encouragement and to Dr. Terry Betts, my second reader. Dr. Sears helped me start this project, and Dr. Cook assisted as I progressed and brought the project to completion.

Jonathan Juedes

Appleton, Wisconsin

December 2023

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The Latin word *advent* means arrival. Christian churches traditionally observe *Advent* in the weeks leading up to Christmas. The season celebrates Old Testament themes and Scriptures predicting the Messiah's arrival and the fulfillment of God's promises.<sup>1</sup> While the prevailing expectation among first-century Jews was one advent of the Messiah, Jesus affirmed two advents (Acts 1:6; cf. 1:11). Jesus as Messiah fulfilled the OT promises "in principle" during his first advent.<sup>2</sup> However, Jesus did not fully realize the OT promises during his first advent. He will at his second.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, today, Christians live between Jesus's first and second advents.<sup>4</sup>

Living between Jesus's first and second advents is not easy. Experiencing God's promises in principle but not fullness results in tension and paradox. Yet the Bible's authors addressed the challenges of living at this time in salvation history. First Peter is a letter addressed to Christians living between Jesus's first and second advents

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<sup>1</sup> God's OT promises include "the arrival of God's saving reign, the pouring out of the Spirit, a new temple, the full forgiveness of sin, the judgment and defeat of God's enemies, resurrection life, eschatological rest, a restored Israel, a transformed people composed of believing Jews and Gentiles, and a new creation." Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 735.

<sup>2</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 738.

<sup>3</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 738. The belief that Jesus's life, death, and resurrection fulfilled God's promises but that their complete fulfillment awaits Jesus's return is called Inaugurated Eschatology.

<sup>4</sup> Steven Richard Bechtler, *Following in His Steps: Suffering, Community, and Christology in 1 Peter*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 162 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 134; Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 608.

with the knowledge that “the end of all things is at hand” (1 Pet 4:7a).<sup>5</sup> First Peter encourages Christians to “stand firm” and advance God's redemptive mission by drawing on Jesus’s suffering and Israel’s identity and mission from the Old Testament (1 Pet 5:12).

What follows is a series of sermons on 1 Peter for Valley Baptist Church in Appleton, Wisconsin. The purpose of developing these sermons was not homiletical but theological—to explore and practice how biblical theology and biblical-theological methods inform preaching 1 Peter.

This introductory chapter will show first that biblical theology is necessary for providing a contextual framework for reading the Bible and for discerning the Bible’s overall message. Second, that biblical theology is integral to sermon preparation and answers critical questions about 1 Peter. Third, that a biblical-theological sermon series on 1 Peter can help Valley Baptist Church grow in its interpretation of the Bible and its understanding of Christian persecution. Fourth, that many excellent books and commentaries exist on 1 Peter to help develop the sermon series. Finally, that the sermon series consisted of seven sermons covering the letter’s body (1 Pet 1:3-5:11).

### **Purpose of Biblical Theology**

Rarely is the Bible read in a vacuum. Everyone reads the Bible with preconceived frameworks that shape their interpretation. James Hamilton observes, “We cannot, after all, abstract ourselves from our creatureliness, from our backgrounds and experiences, and from our convictions and beliefs. . . . If our presuppositions do not help us understand, rather than pretend we do not have them, why not revise, or if necessary,

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<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from the English Standard Version (ESV).

reject them?”<sup>6</sup> Recognizing that readers bring presuppositions to biblical interpretation, adopting an intentional contextual framework becomes necessary.

### **Reading the Bible on Its Own Terms**

One foundational principle for interpreting the Bible is to read the Bible in context. One of the theological disciplines developed to provide a contextual framework for biblical interpretation is biblical theology. Central to biblical theology is the conviction that the Bible provides its own context for interpretation.<sup>7</sup> Biblical theology aims to interpret the Bible on “its own terms” and with the “perspective of the biblical authors.”<sup>8</sup> Biblical theology emphasizes the text and authorial intention, distinguishing it from other theological disciplines such as systematic, historical, and practical theology.<sup>9</sup> These disciplines approach the Bible with an established set of questions and presuppositions, either logical, analytical, or historical. Biblical theology is also distinct from reader-centered approaches that ignore the perspective of the Bible’s authors and ask, “What does the Bible mean to me?” In contrast, “biblical theology, though it cannot escape cultural influences, aims to be first and foremost inductive and descriptive.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> James M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 37.

<sup>7</sup> The conviction of German scholar Johann Phillip Gabler was to present the biblical witness as is, without imposing modern categories or assumptions. He gave an address in 1787 titled, “The Proper Distinction Between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology and the Specific Objectives of Each.” Gabler’s lecture was a significant event in developing the academic discipline of biblical theology. C. H. H. Scobie, “History of Biblical Theology,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 13.

<sup>8</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Exegesis and Hermeneutics,” in Alexander and Rosner, *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 52; James M. Hamilton Jr., *What Is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible’s Story, Symbolism, and Patterns* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 15.

<sup>9</sup> For a description of each theological discipline and its distinctions, see Layton Talbert, “Levels of Systematic Theology and the Role of Logic,” *Journal of Biblical Theology and Worldview* 1, no. 2 (2021): 6-7.

<sup>10</sup> D. A. Carson, “Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology,” in Alexander and Rosner, *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 9.

Biblical theology's inductive nature is evident in the titles of biblical-theological works such as *The Pauline Eschatology* and *The Theology of the Letters of James, Peter, and Jude*.<sup>11</sup> The titles show a method to understand the theology of a biblical writer or book within its historical and literary context. Biblical theology's inductive nature makes it valuable for biblical interpretation.<sup>12</sup> By applying biblical theology, "we can guard against the tendency to read our own questions and issues into the text."<sup>13</sup>

Because of biblical theology's inductive nature, interpreters should apply biblical theological methods before other methods.<sup>14</sup> Prioritizing biblical theology does not mean that biblical theology is superior to other theological disciplines or practiced in isolation.<sup>15</sup> Yet other theological disciplines are helpful only if they remain connected to the biblical text. Layton Talbert argues, "the further we move from the stable textual footing the less authority we can claim for our theological conclusions. Ultimate theological authority always resides in the text."<sup>16</sup> Because the very nature of biblical theology is to read the Bible on its own terms, inductively, and from the perspective of the Bible's authors, biblical theology retains an essential place in biblical interpretation.

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<sup>11</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952); Andrew Chester and Ralph P. Martin, *New Testament Theology: The Theology of James, Peter, and Jude* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>12</sup> Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 37.

<sup>13</sup> Andreas J. Kostenberger, "The Sizemore Lectures, 2018. The Promise of Biblical Theology: What Biblical Theology Is and What It Isn't," *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 17, no. 1 (2018): 7.

<sup>14</sup> Kostenberger, "The Sizemore Lectures," 5; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 49; D. L. Baker, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 99.

<sup>15</sup> Jason S. DeRouchie, Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli, *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, 40 Questions Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2020), 119-29; Carson, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," 102-3.

<sup>16</sup> Talbert, "Levels of Systematic Theology and the Role of Logic," 23.

## Reading the Bible as Unified Scripture

Besides providing a contextual framework for biblical interpretation, biblical theology is also necessary for understanding the Bible's unified message. A unified message exists because of the Bible's dual authorship. The Bible is the work of diverse human authors, but it is also the unified work of a single divine author. Because of the Bible's unified message, how we read the Bible must reflect a divine author. Kevin Vanhoozer argues, "To read the Bible as unified Scripture is not just one interpretative interest among others, but the interpretative strategy that best corresponds to the nature of the text itself, given its divine inspiration."<sup>17</sup>

Since biblical theology seeks to interpret the Bible from the perspective of the biblical authors, including the divine author, it also "seeks to uncover and articulate the unity of all the biblical texts taken together."<sup>18</sup> Biblical theology expands the interpretive task beyond the Bible's human authors to include the divine author and the entire Bible. The expanded whole-Bible interpretive project of biblical theology is not secondary but a central concern.<sup>19</sup> Biblical theology's whole-Bible method is necessary for understanding the Bible's unified message and redemptive history's goal.

Understanding the Bible's unified message requires considering the human and divine authors' intent. When considering the human authors' intent, meaning is "established by the intent of its human author."<sup>20</sup> But because of the Bible's divine author, "texts are also embedded with 'divine authorial intentions' that may surpass the intent of its human authors."<sup>21</sup> The way the biblical authors interpreted Scripture is

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<sup>17</sup> Vanhoozer, "Exegesis and Hermeneutics," 61.

<sup>18</sup> Carson, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," 100.

<sup>19</sup> Hamilton emphasizes, "To do biblical theology is to think of the whole story of the Bible." Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology?*, 12.

<sup>20</sup> Aubrey M. Sequeira, *The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Fulfillment in Christ: Biblical-Theological Exegesis in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 82.

<sup>21</sup> Sequeira, *The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Fulfillment in Christ*, 82. For the contrary

evidence of these divine intentions. At times, they assigned meanings to earlier biblical texts that went beyond the intentions of their human authors.<sup>22</sup>

Debate exists about how the divine and human authors' intentions relate and whether they are accessible to anyone other than the inspired NT authors. The arguments for and against are beyond the scope of this project.<sup>23</sup> But assuming that the intentions of the divine author and human author relate to one another and remain accessible to contemporary readers, "The unified message of the Bible only becomes clear as it develops across the canon of Scripture."<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the whole Bible must become the final context for biblical interpretation, not the human authors' limited interpretive perspective. Richard Lints explains this interpretive approach. He states, "This is not to say that a given passage should not be analyzed in terms of its genre and literary setting but rather that part of the meaning of the text lies in its connection with the rest of the biblical material and hence that part of the interpretive horizon of any individual text is the entirety of the biblical text."<sup>25</sup>

Several implications flow out of a unified message developed across the Bible. Examples include a discernable biblical storyline, the development of biblical themes, and the identification of biblical promises and their fulfillments. The most significant implication is the ability to identify Jesus Christ as the goal of redemptive history and in

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view that the human and divine authors' intentions must be the same, see Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "The Single Intent of Scripture," in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 55-69.

<sup>22</sup> Douglas J. Moo and Andrew David Naselli, "The Problem of the New Testament's Use of the Old Testament," in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 722. Moo and Naselli cite the use of Joel 2:32 in Rom 10:13 and the application of Ps 2:7 and 2 Sam 7:14 to Jesus as examples of NT authors interpreting OT passages beyond the OT authors' intentions.

<sup>23</sup> To consider the argument's two sides, see G. K. Beale, *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994).

<sup>24</sup> Sequeira, *The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Fulfillment in Christ*, 82; DeRouchie, Martin, and Naselli, *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, 143.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 293 n4.



whom the Old and New Testaments “progress, integrate, and climax.”<sup>26</sup> Without biblical theology, these lines of inquiry either do not exist or remain unexplored. Biblical theology is necessary for understanding the Bible’s unified message. “No exegetical task is complete until we have related a specific text to the overall message of the Bible.”<sup>27</sup>

### **Biblical Theology and Preaching**

As preachers labor to bring a biblical passage to life, taking it from text to sermon, using biblical theology is an essential step in the process.<sup>28</sup> Concerning biblical theology’s importance for preaching, David Helm argues, “Exegetical preaching that stops with exegesis becomes merely intellectual or overly imperatival. . . . The next phase of sermon preparation is still required: theological reflection. Without this, you are not ready to preach.”<sup>29</sup> Because faithful preaching necessitates theological reflection, including biblical-theological reflection, preachers must incorporate biblical theology into their sermon preparation and adopt a suitable method for doing so.

### **A Biblical-Theological Method for Sermon Preparation**

Richard Lints identifies three horizons for theological interpretation that can serve as a method for incorporating biblical theology in sermon preparation.<sup>30</sup> These

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<sup>26</sup> DeRouchie, Martin, and Naselli, *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, 52.

<sup>27</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, “Lecture 1: The Necessity and Viability of Biblical Theology,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12, no. 4 (2008): 8.

<sup>28</sup> For preaching and Bible study methods that include a step for biblical theology, see David R. Helm, *Expositional Preaching: How We Speak God’s Word Today* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014); Robby Gallaty and Steven Smith, *Preaching for the Rest of Us: Essentials for Text-Driven Preaching* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2018); Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned Mathews, eds., *Text-Driven Preaching: God’s Word at the Heart of Every Sermon* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010); Andrew David Naselli, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017); Jason S. DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017); Jerry Vines and James L. Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons*, Revised Edition (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2017).

<sup>29</sup> Helm, *Expositional Preaching*, 61.

<sup>30</sup> Lints, *The Fabric of Theology*, 293-95. Lints developed the three horizons from Edmond

horizons flow from Scripture's dual authorship and the progressive nature of biblical revelation. They are the textual horizon, the epochal horizon, and the canonical horizon.<sup>31</sup> Together, these horizons form three overlapping trajectories, each broader than the first.

The textual horizon contains the world of the text itself. The textual horizon is the narrowest of the trajectories. The textual horizon includes the historical context of the text or book, including the author, genre, audience, and the occasion for writing.<sup>32</sup> It also includes the literary context, how the author organizes and structures ideas, and uses words and symbols.<sup>33</sup> These descriptions make it clear that the textual horizon is anchored in the world of the human author.

If the textual horizon is anchored in the world of the human author, the epochal horizon is anchored in the progressive nature of divine revelation. Lints observes, "The Scriptures possess a unified theological framework, but it is a framework that is progressively revealed in history."<sup>34</sup> While the Bible has unity, it also has discontinuity. God's plans develop and progress throughout redemptive history rather than all at once. Lints argues, "Neither God nor his promises change from epoch to epoch, but his progressive revelation of himself and his redemptive plans do take on different appearances in different periods."<sup>35</sup> The epochal horizon is a transition point between the textual and canonical horizons. When considering the epochs themselves, they are best

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Clowney and added a fourth: the "contemporary horizon." Edmond P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961).

<sup>31</sup> Lints, *The Fabric of Theology*, 293-95. These horizons are identified by other scholars as the "immediate context, the covenantal context, and the canonical context." See DeRouchie, Martin, and Naselli, *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, 51-52; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 118-29.

<sup>32</sup> Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 49-52.

<sup>33</sup> Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 54-57.

<sup>34</sup> Lints, *The Fabric of Theology*, 300.

<sup>35</sup> Lints, *The Fabric of Theology*, 301.

identified with the biblical covenants.<sup>36</sup> Gentry and Wellum explain, “Most if not all, of these epochal divisions are tied to the biblical covenants, which is why we contend that the Bible’s own way of making epochal divisions is by the progression of the covenants.”<sup>37</sup>

If the textual horizon is anchored in the world of the human author, and the epochal horizon is anchored in the progression of the biblical covenants, the canonical horizon is anchored in the story of redemptive history.<sup>38</sup> In the broadest terms, we can summarize the Bible’s canonical horizon with the words creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. Redemptive history also has central characters. “God is the protagonist, and Satan is the antagonist.”<sup>39</sup> They are at war, “each seeking the allegiance of humans made in God’s image.”<sup>40</sup>

Two concepts unite redemptive history, “promise-fulfillment” and typology.<sup>41</sup> Concerning promise-fulfillment, Hunter and Wellum explain, “Promise and fulfillment glue the Bible’s diverse phases together. . . . The Old Testament is the story of God’s promise, and the New Testament is God’s fulfillment of all he has promised.”<sup>42</sup> One specific expression of promise-fulfillment is typology. Typology is the study of biblical types. Mitchell Chase defines a type as “a person, office, place, institution, event, or thing

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<sup>36</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 122. For a description of the covenants, see p. 168.

<sup>37</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 122. Gentry and Wellum go on to argue, “Tying the Bible’s epochal divisions to the progression of the biblical covenants allows for a nonarbitrary way to account for how the Old Testament is structured on its own terms, and how its epochs are divided (123).” Reflecting on their view that the epochs are built on the covenants, Gentry and Wellum refer to the epochal horizon as the “covenantal horizon.”

<sup>38</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 126; Lints, *The Fabric of Theology*, 303.

<sup>39</sup> Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology?*, 29.

<sup>40</sup> Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology?*, 29; Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible & Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997).

<sup>41</sup> Trent W. Hunter and Stephen J. Wellum, *Christ from Beginning to End: How the Full Story of Scripture Reveals the Full Glory of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 36.

<sup>42</sup> Hunter and Wellum, *Christ from Beginning to End*, 36.

in salvation history that anticipates, shares correspondence with, escalates toward, and resolves in its antitype.”<sup>43</sup> By anchoring a text in the biblical story through typology and promise-fulfillment, the textual and epochal horizons are unified into one canonical horizon climaxing in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

This three-horizon framework for biblical interpretation provided a helpful method for incorporating biblical theology in sermon preparation and was the method I used for this project.<sup>44</sup> On the strength of this method for biblical interpretation, Gentry and Wellum state,

In the final analysis, this is the best way to read Scripture and to draw theological conclusions because it does justice to what Scripture is and how it comes to us as progressive revelation. In this way we are letting Scripture interpret Scripture; we are seeking to unfold how the Bible itself is given to us, in its own intrasystematic categories and storyline, so that in the end, we read, apply, and draw theological conclusions from Scripture according to God’s intent.<sup>45</sup>

### **Applying Biblical-Theological Methods to 1 Peter**

Two interpretive questions for preaching 1 Peter concern identifying the letter’s addressees and the reason for Christian persecution featured so prominently in the letter.<sup>46</sup> Addressing both questions early in preaching 1 Peter is essential, as they impact the letter’s interpretation. Applying the biblical-theological method described above provides helpful answers to these questions and demonstrates biblical theology’s value for preaching and this project.

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<sup>43</sup> Mitchell L. Chase, *40 Questions about Typology and Allegory*, 40 Questions Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2020), 39. For examples of types, see DeRouchie, Martin, and Naselli, *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, 86-87.

<sup>44</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 127; Aubrey M. Sequeira, “Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Response to Daniel Block, Elliott Johnson, and Vern Poythress,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 22, no. 3 (2018): 191; DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament*, 367; *The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Fulfillment in Christ*, 90-91.

<sup>45</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 127.

<sup>46</sup> I am assuming 1 Peter’s author was Simon Peter, Jesus’s disciple, as the letter claims (1 Pet 1:1). For reasons why see Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 14-19.

One might mistakenly think Peter wrote to a Jewish audience from its textual horizon.<sup>47</sup> Some interpreters justify this conclusion by the significant amount of OT Jewish imagery and descriptions of Israel. For instance, Peter uses the OT descriptions of “chosen people,” “royal priesthood,” and “holy nation,” leading interpreters to infer a Jewish audience (1 Pet 2:9; cf. Exod 19:5-6).

However, remembering God’s revelation progresses from epoch to epoch, one new covenant epochal development affecting Peter’s audience was God including Gentiles into his covenant people. Ephesians 3:6 states that “the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”<sup>48</sup> Gentile inclusion is a significant development that reflects the discontinuity between the old and new covenants.

Even as the two covenants differ on Gentile inclusion, the language used for God’s people in the OT and NT remains the same. In the NT, “descriptions of Israel as God’s covenant people are applied to the church through her identification with Christ.”<sup>49</sup> Since the new covenant epoch includes Gentiles in God’s family, Peter applies OT descriptions to Gentile believers. Therefore, Peter is addressing not a Jewish audience but a mixed audience of Jews and Gentiles and one that is predominately Gentile.<sup>50</sup> The textual horizon also indicates the primary focus is Gentile recipients (1 Pet 1:14, 18; 4:3-5).<sup>51</sup> By selecting OT language to describe Christians, Peter shows awareness of prior

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<sup>47</sup> “Most ancient exegetes except Augustine and Jerome understood the recipients of the letter to be converts from Judaism.” Jobes, *1 Peter*, 23.

<sup>48</sup> See also Rom 9:24-26.

<sup>49</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 749.

<sup>50</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 49 (Waco, TX: Word, 1988), xlv-xlvi. See also Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter: A Commentary on 1 Peter*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 51; Peter H. Davids, *A Theology of James, Peter, and Jude*, Biblical Theology of the New Testament 6 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 103; J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, Black’s New Testament Commentaries (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 4; Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2003), 38.

<sup>51</sup> The cited verses describe Gentile characteristics rather than Jewish. For example, 1 Pet 1:14

epochs and how previous epochs relate to Christians. With this understanding, Peter uses OT language for Jews *and* Gentiles to reinforce Christians' identity as God's chosen people.

A second challenge for preaching 1 Peter is identifying why the persecution depicted in 1 Peter persists and becomes normative for Christian believers even after Jesus's advent (1 Pet 4:12). Kelly Liebengood grasps the challenge well when he says,

If Jesus truly is the Christ, God's chosen redemptive agent who has come to restore God's people, how can it be that Christian suffering is a necessary part of discipleship after his coming, death and resurrection? What led the author of 1 Peter to such a startling conclusion, which seems to run against the grain of the eschatological hope and expectations of Jewish restoration theology?<sup>52</sup>

Some answer this question by appealing to the actual socio-political status of Peter's audience because Peter describes them as "sojourners and exiles" (1 Pet 2:11).<sup>53</sup> This view understands that the suffering portrayed in 1 Peter is primarily rooted in the political and social circumstances faced by its first-century audience, rather than arising from their theological identity resulting from the new birth (1 Pet 1:3).<sup>54</sup> But doing so underemphasizes the biblical story's canonical horizon for two reasons.

First, prioritizing social circumstances overlooks the ongoing battle between God and Satan expressed in God's promise of ongoing enmity between the woman's and

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describes 1 Peter's audience's ignorance. Eph 4:18 understands ignorance as characteristic of Gentiles. See Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 120.

<sup>52</sup> Kelly D. Liebengood, *The Eschatology of 1 Peter: Considering the Influence of Zechariah 9-14* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 8.

<sup>53</sup> This is Elliott's proposal. John H. Elliott, *1 Peter*, The Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 37B (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 98-103. Also Jobes, but to a lesser extent. Jobes, *1 Peter*, 25-27.

<sup>54</sup> Elliott argues that "the letter was addressed to persons who were actual strangers and resident aliens in Asia Minor prior to their conversion and who remains so after their conversion." Elliott, *1 Peter*, 101. However, Elliott's literal view is nuanced. Dryden summarizes Elliott's view, writing, "The literal sense of social status, which applied to *some* of the community, becomes transposed into a metaphorical sense for the *whole* community." J. de Waal Dryden, *Theology and Ethics in 1 Peter: Paraenetic Strategies for Christian Character Formation*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 2/209 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 127-28. Emphasis original.

serpent's seeds stretching back to Genesis 3:15.<sup>55</sup> God fulfilled his promise of enmity in the persecution afflicted on God's people throughout the biblical story.<sup>56</sup> Persecution began with Abel's murder, and it climaxed with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Surprisingly, Peter reveals Genesis 3:15's fulfillment continues in Christians' ongoing suffering from opponents even as Jesus rose from the dead.<sup>57</sup> As proof, Peter attributes his audience's sufferings to Satan, saying, "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet 5:8). Social and political persecution of Christians from the biblical story's perspective originates with God's enemy Satan and the enmity promised in Genesis 3:15.<sup>58</sup>

Second, appealing primarily to Peter's audience's socio-political circumstances overlooks God's final judgment. God tested Adam in Genesis 3, and God continued to test his covenant people throughout redemptive history culminating in Jesus's testing and judgment on the cross (Deut 8:2; 1 Chr 21:1; Mark 1:12-13; 14:36; Heb 2:18).<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, rather than testing both Christians and non-Christians together at the end of

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<sup>55</sup> Glenn M. Penner, *In the Shadow of the Cross: A Biblical Theology of Persecution and Discipleship* (Bartlesville, OK, 2004), 26-27. Penner observes, "It is in Genesis 3 that we see the basis for the coming persecution of God's people. The price of reconciling creation to its Creator will take place in a context of suffering and conflict."

<sup>56</sup> Hamilton suggests, "The seed of the woman can be both a particular descendant and the group of descendants who hope for the victory of their seed." James M. Hamilton Jr., "The Soul Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10, no. 2 (2006): 31. See also Jonathan M. Cheek, "The Individual and Collective Offspring of the Woman: The Canonical Outworking of Genesis 3:15," *Themelios* 48, no. 1 (2023): 29-46.

<sup>57</sup> Boyd, *God at War*, 276.

<sup>58</sup> For instance, Jesus confronted his opponents who rejected his message and sought to harm him, asserting that their actions and desires were in line with the devil, who is described as both a murderer and a liar (John 8:44).

<sup>59</sup> G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 948. Beale argues, "The NT portrays the final judgment as beginning, and that it begins with Christ's crucifixion, where he suffers the final judgement. . . . In this the final judgment has been pushed back from the very end of history to the cross of Christ in the first century." Ellingsworth understands that Jesus's testing included the cross in addition to his testing in the wilderness and Gethsemane. He states concerning Heb 2:18, "However, it is perhaps best to take the primary meaning of *πειρασμοί* here to be 'test' (as clearly in 11:17). . . . In this way. . . it is possible to see the cross as being itself Christ's supreme *πειρασμός*." Paul Ellingsworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 191.

history, Peter reveals that God's final judgment that began with Jesus continues against Christians whose sufferings they share (1 Pet 4:17; 5:6). Peter writes in 4:17, "For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?"<sup>60</sup>

Therefore, even as persecution occurs within socio-political circumstances and relationships, Peter identifies persecution as Satan's attacks and God's final judgment reflecting the canonical horizon of the entire Bible.<sup>61</sup> As a result, Christians continue to suffer even as Jesus endured God's judgment and defeated Satan on the cross.

As discouraging as it is to learn that persecution persists for Christians, Genesis 3:15 promises Satan's complete and decisive defeat, not a partial victory. Furthermore, God does not condemn Christians with persecution. Instead, God purifies Christians using persecution and sustains them through it (1 Pet 1:5, 7). Finally, Peter understands that Jesus's victory gives Christians the hope of eventual victory and vindication when he returns (1 Pet 3:18-22; 5:6).<sup>62</sup>

As a result of biblical-theological reflection, 1 Peter contributes a theology of persecution explained by the biblical story from Genesis to Revelation. As a result, Christians can experience persecution anytime, regardless of social or political circumstances. Peter also uses the identity of ethnic Jews from prior covenants to

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<sup>60</sup> Jobes, *1 Peter*, 292. Jobes observes, "His association of pagan hostility and God's judgment is by inference and is not explicit. The presence of the definite article (*to kirma*) and the allusion to the prophetic tradition of fiery eschatological judgment implies that the judgment in view is God's."

<sup>61</sup> There is a cultural-historical dimension to persecution. But as Dryden clarifies, "In the logic of the epistle, this social estrangement has roots that go *beyond* the social. Dryden, *Theology and Ethics in 1 Peter*, 130. Emphasis original. For an overview of the historical situation, see Peter H. Davids, *A Theology of James, Peter, and Jude*, 112-121.

<sup>62</sup> Beale reports, "O. Cullmann describes the difference between Jesus's first and second comings by using the World War II analogy of D-day and V-Day. Jesus's first coming (the 'already') is D-Day, since it marks the battle in which Satan is decisively defeated. The Second Coming of Christ is V-Day, when Jesus's enemies will surrender and bow down to him." G. K. Beale, "Eschatology," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 332.



encourage all Christians, even Gentiles, to stand firm as they live between Jesus's first and second advents.

### **Literature Review**

The following resources provided a foundation for studying 1 Peter and developing the biblical-theological sermon series for Valley Baptist Church. I divided these resources into two categories. The first category consists of commentaries on 1 Peter. The second category consists of theological works on the Bible, the NT, and 1 Peter.

#### **Commentaries**

In 1976, Peter Elliott lamented the lack of attention given to 1 Peter in biblical scholarship, calling 1 Peter the “exegetical step-child” of the NT.<sup>63</sup> Thankfully, the commentaries below have remedied 1 Peter's past neglect.

Peter Elliott's *1 Peter* is his remedy to the lack of scholarship.<sup>64</sup> The commentary is two or three times the size of other 1 Peter commentaries at almost a thousand pages. Elliott's commentary provides a wealth of cultural and historical background information.

D. A. Carson identifies Paul Achtemeier's commentary on 1 Peter as the “fullest commentary in English at the exegetical level” and a “masterpiece of careful scholarship.”<sup>65</sup> Before Achtemeier's commentary, the standard critical work on 1 Peter was the commentary by Edward Selwyn, published in 1946.<sup>66</sup> Selwyn's commentary remains a valuable resource despite its age.

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<sup>63</sup> Elliott, *1 Peter*, 3.

<sup>64</sup> Elliott, *1 Peter*, 3.

<sup>65</sup> D. A. Carson, *New Testament Commentary Survey*, 6th ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 136; Achtemeier, *1 Peter*.

<sup>66</sup> Edward G. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter with Introduction, Notes, and Essays*

Two German works translated into English are *The First Letter of Peter: A Commentary on the Greek Text* by Reinhold Feldmeier and *A Commentary on I Peter* by Leonhard Goppelt.<sup>67</sup> Feldmeier's conclusion that 1 Peter's audience is in exile because of the new birth, not socio-political circumstances, is required reading. Goppelt's commentary is richly theological. More than any other commentary, he explores links between 1 Peter, the OT, and Jewish intertestamental literature.

Two general-purpose commentaries are David Michael's *I Peter in the Word Biblical Commentary Series* and Karen Jobes' *I Peter in the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament Series*.<sup>68</sup> The introduction of Michael's commentary, where he discusses authorship, date, and purpose, is short but excellent as an introduction to 1 Peter. Jobes' work is at the top of many lists for best 1 Peter commentaries. Less technical but just as helpful are commentaries by Peter Davids, J. N. D. Kelly, I. Howard Marshall, and Thomas Schreiner.<sup>69</sup>

### **Theological Works**

Like the commentary literature, older theological works also overlooked Peter's theology. For instance, George E. Ladd, in his *A Theology of the New Testament*, published in 1974, summarized 1 Peter's theology, stating, "The book is theologically rich. However, since these ideas embody little that is theologically different from Peter in Acts or from Paul, they need be here only summarized without extensive exposition."<sup>70</sup>

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(London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd, 1946).

<sup>67</sup> Reinhard Feldmeier, *The First Letter of Peter: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, trans. Peter H. Davids (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008); Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on I Peter*, ed. Ferdinand Hahn, trans. John E. Alsup (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).

<sup>68</sup> Michaels, *I Peter*; Jobes, *I Peter*.

<sup>69</sup> Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude*; I. Howard Marshall, *I Peter*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991); Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*.

<sup>70</sup> George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 595.

Despite the theological neglect of 1 Peter in the past, substantial theological works on Peter's theology now exist.

Two whole-Bible biblical theologies that include sections on 1 Peter are *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* by James Hamilton and *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* by Thomas Schreiner.<sup>71</sup> Hamilton's work identifies the biblical-theological theme of exodus as an important theme. Schreiner's treatment is more general, connecting 1 Peter to biblical-theological themes in Scripture. Another biblical theology focusing on persecution and suffering is *In the Shadow of the Cross: A Biblical Theology of Persecution and Discipleship* by Glenn M. Penner.<sup>72</sup>

For NT theology, 1 Peter in Frank Matera's *New Testament Theology: Exploring Diversity and Unity* receives comprehensive treatment.<sup>73</sup> Matera defines the focus of 1 Peter as addressing Christians "living in a hostile world. . . . They are not to flee from the world but to live as Christians in the world, so that by the example of their lives, they can convince others of the genuineness of their faith."<sup>74</sup> Frank Thielman also has a helpful chapter on 1 Peter in his *A Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach*.<sup>75</sup> Thielman places the letter alongside Hebrews and Revelation, addressing Christian endurance amid suffering.<sup>76</sup>

Individual theological works on 1 Peter include Peter David's *A Theology of James, Peter, Jude* in the *Biblical Theology of the New Testament Series* and *New*

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<sup>71</sup> Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*; Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*.

<sup>72</sup> Penner, *In the Shadow of the Cross*.

<sup>73</sup> Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Theology: Exploring Diversity and Unity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

<sup>74</sup> Matera, *New Testament Theology*, 372.

<sup>75</sup> Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

<sup>76</sup> Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament*, 495.

*Testament Theology: The Theology of James, Peter, and Jude* by Andrew Chester and Ralph Martin.<sup>77</sup> Both works focus on 1 Peter's theology and identify key theological themes. An important work for 1 Peter's use of the OT is *Written to Serve: The Use of Scripture in 1 Peter* by Benjamin Sergant.<sup>78</sup> Also important is Steven Bechtler's "Following in His Steps: Suffering, Community, and Christology in 1 Peter" for 1 Peter's theology of suffering.<sup>79</sup> Finally, Joel Green ends his commentary on 1 Peter with a series of chapters on the theology of 1 Peter, including chapters on suffering and 1 Peter's use of the OT.<sup>80</sup>

### Contextual Analysis

Preaching is more than an exercise in knowledge transfer. Preaching also attempts to model for listeners how to read and interpret the Bible. Peter Elliott identifies approximately forty-six OT citations and allusions in 1 Peter.<sup>81</sup> Also, Peter's repeated use of the Bible's epochal and canonical horizons makes 1 Peter an ideal book to model making biblical-theological connections.

Since 2019, I have had the privilege of serving as an Associate Pastor at Valley Baptist Church in Appleton, Wisconsin. Valley Baptist is a congregation with a deep love for the Bible. While never hearing the term textual horizon, they know to consider grammatical and historical background when reading the Bible. As they grow in their ability to interpret the Bible, their next step is to apply a larger interpretive lens and make

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<sup>77</sup> Davids, *A Theology of James, Peter, and Jude*; Chester and Martin, *New Testament Theology*.

<sup>78</sup> Benjamin Sargent, *Written to Serve: The Use of Scripture in 1 Peter*, The Library of New Testament Series (London: T&T Clark, 2018).

<sup>79</sup> Bechtler, *Following in His Steps*.

<sup>80</sup> Joel B. Green, *1 Peter*, The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

<sup>81</sup> Elliott, *1 Peter*, 16.

biblical-theological connections between the OT and NT. Further, they must develop a greater awareness of a passage's place in the larger biblical story.

Besides a sermon series on 1 Peter supplying an opportunity for the congregation to grow in their use of biblical theology, 1 Peter's theology of suffering and persecution is its theological contribution to NT theology. Valley Baptist Church acknowledges the possibility of suffering, but the church can benefit from a developed understanding of the subject. A sermon series on 1 Peter allowed me to encourage Valley Baptist Church to pray for their persecuted brothers and sisters worldwide and to prepare for and understand persecution as they live between Jesus's first and second advents.

### **Series Outline**

First Peter is a unified letter with an introduction (1:1-2), a body (1:3-5:11), and a concluding salutation (5:12-13). Below, I divided the letter's body into seven parts and provided a summary for each. The summaries trace the structure and argument of the letter's body and identify epochal and canonical connections with the rest of Scripture. These summaries formed the basis of the biblical-theological sermon series on 1 Peter for Valley Baptist Church in Appleton, Wisconsin.

#### **1 Peter 1:3-12**

First Peter's letter body begins with a declaration of praise to God for salvation. A single sentence, verses 3-12 divides into three sections.<sup>82</sup> The first section, verses 3-5, identifies salvation as oriented not toward the present but toward the future. It specifies that Christians do not merit salvation through human effort. Instead, salvation is the direct result of God giving new birth and guarding his people until the day salvation arrives.

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<sup>82</sup> Green, *1 Peter*, 22.

The second section, verses 6-9, turns from the future to the present. In the present, Christians' knowledge of their salvation leads to joy even as the present circumstances include trials. These verses reveal two sides of the Christian experience: joy rooted in the future and sorrow rooted in present circumstances.<sup>83</sup> Since the first part of the letter's goal is to focus on the positive side of Christian identity, verses 6-9 focus on suffering's positive contributions.

The third section, verses 10-12, looks to the past and addresses the privileged position Christ-followers have within God's redemptive plan. Regardless of circumstances, Christians live in the enviable time of God fulfilling his promises.

### **1 Peter 1:13-2:3**

Having praised God for salvation and encouraged Christians with the privileges of their new birth, Christians' lives must reflect their new birth. First Peter 1:13-2:3 expresses this expectation in five commands. The commands include: setting hope on Jesus's return (1:13), living holy lives (1:15), showing reverence towards God (1:17), loving one another (1:22), and desiring God's Word (2:2).

Accompanying these ethical expectations, 1:13-2:3 uses language from Israel's exodus from Egypt.<sup>84</sup> By incorporating the language of the exodus, Peter places his moral instructions within the Bible's larger story and covenant expectations for Israel. Peter's exodus imagery reinforces Christians' identity as God's covenant people.<sup>85</sup> The imagery also justifies the expectation that Christians must adopt a new way of life.

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<sup>83</sup> Feldmeier, *The First Letter of Peter*, 60.

<sup>84</sup> Goppelt, *A Commentary on I Peter*, 105. Goppelt observes, "The most important tradition-historical factor is seen in a motif that permeates and shapes the entire section, namely, the motif of the exodus."

<sup>85</sup> Achtemeier, *I Peter*, 115.

### **1 Peter 2:4-10**

The first section of the letter's body ends by continuing to apply the identity of Israel to Christians. First Peter 2:4-10 describe them as God's temple and people (2:5, 9).

Verses 4-8 identify Christians as God's temple because of their relationship to Jesus.<sup>86</sup> Since God now dwells in Jesus Christ as he dwelled in his previous sanctuaries, the dividing line between God's people and those who are not is no longer ethnicity but faith in Christ.<sup>87</sup>

Verses 9-10 recognize Christians as God's chosen people using language previously used for Israel. As God's chosen people, Christ-followers share Israel's mission of proclaiming God and his works to the nations.<sup>88</sup> With these affirmations, the first section of the letter's body ends.

### **1 Peter 2:11-3:12**

Following the focus on the identity of Peter's audience, 2:11-3:12 begins the second section of the letter by discussing Christians' engagement with their persecutors. The verses also discuss the adverse side of Christian identity as "sojourners and exiles." This discussion carries through to the end of the letter.

2:11-12 gives the engagement "plan" for Christians.<sup>89</sup> They are to "abstain from the passions of the flesh" and live "honorably" in the eyes of their opponents. The goal is evangelistic; living this way will have a positive spiritual effect on those around them.

2:13-3:7 apply the engagement plan to specific relationships: ruling authorities (2:13-17), masters and slaves (2:18-25), and unbelieving spouses (3:1-7). The

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<sup>86</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 331.

<sup>87</sup> Jobes, *1 Peter*, 143.

<sup>88</sup> Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter*, 147.

<sup>89</sup> Michaels, *1 Peter*, 120.

development of Peter's approach of nonretaliation and righteous living is not without precedence, as they find their basis in Isaiah's suffering servant and Jesus's example (2:21-25; cf. Isa 53:4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 12).

Finally, 3:8-12 address the Christian community. As a general principle, reflecting Psalm 34:12-16, Christian believers can expect God's protection and blessing when they live righteously.<sup>90</sup>

### **1 Peter 3:13-4:6**

Having stated how Christians are to relate to their opponents, 1 Peter 3:13-4:6 discusses the adverse side of Christian identity and the topic of unjust suffering. Peter's goal is to encourage Christians.

3:13-17 reveal that persecution causes no "ultimate harm" and is a mark of privilege and blessing.<sup>91</sup> As a result, Christians have no reason to fear persecution. Instead, they should remain committed to Jesus and righteous living even when negative experiences are the result.

3:18-22 further encourage Christians with Jesus's example and offer hope. Since God resurrected and vindicated Jesus after he suffered and died, Christian believers also can expect vindication and resurrection.<sup>92</sup> Christians will experience resurrection and vindication because they identified with Jesus in baptism, which Peter links typologically to Noah's vindication and salvation through the flood waters.<sup>93</sup>

4:1-6 exhorts Christians to embrace suffering based on Christ's example in 3:18-22. Like Jesus, doing God's will results in persecution as Christians avoid sin and

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<sup>90</sup> Elliott, *1 Peter*, 601.

<sup>91</sup> Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, 140.

<sup>92</sup> Elliott, *1 Peter*, 689.

<sup>93</sup> Elliott, *1 Peter*, 690.



no longer practice society's sinful behaviors. Though persecuted, Christians can find comfort in knowing that God will bring their opponents to account at the final judgment.

### **1 Peter 4:7-11; 5:1-5**

The focus of 1 Peter is outside the Christian community for most of the letter. First Peter 4:7-11 and 5:1-5, conversely, address relationships inside the Christian community. Since both passages address relationships between Christ-followers, I combined them into one section.

First Peter 4:7-11 encourages Christians to love and serve one another because of the difficulty persecution creates for the Christian community. 1 Peter 5:1-5 addresses the relationship between elders and churches. For elders, 1 Peter 5:1-4 uses the imagery of an OT shepherd to remind elders to serve those they lead instead of taking advantage of them (cf. Ezek 34). For church members, 1 Peter 5:5a commands them to submit to their elders. Finally, 1 Peter 5:5b exhorts elders and church members to show humility to one another.

### **1 Peter 4:12-19; 5:6-11**

In 1 Peter 4:12-19 and 5:6-11, Peter continues to explore Christian persecution. However, the focus shifts to “why suffering is necessary” with the admonition that suffering is normative for Christians living between Jesus's first and second advents (4:12).<sup>94</sup> Since both passages address the theological nature of persecution and ways to respond, I combined them into one section.<sup>95</sup>

4:12-14 explores persecution's normalcy for Christians. Persecution is necessary because persecution strengthens faith and provides a point of connection with

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<sup>94</sup> Goppelt, *A Commentary on I Peter*, 311.

<sup>95</sup> Juan R. Sanchez, *1 Peter For You*, God's Word for You (New Malden, UK: Good Book Company, 2016), 163.

Jesus's suffering and his path to glory. Therefore, connection with Jesus and his sufferings are a source of encouragement because they result in joy and blessing.

4:15-19 explores the normalcy of persecution, as it concerns God's judgment. Christians must endure persecution because suffering is God's plan and the beginning of his final judgment. Nevertheless, God's judgment on Christians is not condemnation but a test to sanctify them for the day of Jesus's return.<sup>96</sup> Because persecution is God's plan and means of testing, Christ-followers should respond by entrusting themselves to him.

5:6-7 continues to attribute Christian persecution to God's plan. Because persecution is from God's "hand," Christians must accept persecution. As an encouragement, acceptance comes with the promise that God will exalt Christians. Though persecution is God's plan, God is present when Christians suffer. As a result, Christians should bring their concerns to him.

Finally, 5:8-11 warns Christians to resist Satan's schemes and commit themselves to Jesus Christ. By acknowledging Satan, Peter identifies a second source of Christians' persecution.<sup>97</sup> After revealing Satan's involvement in persecution, the letter's body ends with a promise and a doxology.<sup>98</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Using biblical-theological methods and resources to look beyond the textual horizon of 1 Peter to its epochal and canonical horizons demonstrates that Peter's call to "stand firm" is relevant for all Christians, including Valley Baptist Church (1 Pet 5:11). Furthermore, any challenges Valley Baptist Church may face are ultimately spiritual; they are God's sanctifying judgment and Satan's attacks. Peter wrote 1 Peter to equip first-century Christians to understand and endure living between Jesus's first and second

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<sup>96</sup> Davids, *A Theology of James, Peter, and Jude*, 152.

<sup>97</sup> Byrley, *Eschatology, Cosmic Conflict, and Suffering in 1 Peter*, 205.

<sup>98</sup> Elliott, *1 Peter*, 846; Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 336.

advents, drawing on Jesus's example and Israel's identity and mission in the OT. A sermon series on 1 Peter can do the same for Valley Baptist Church today.

## CHAPTER 2

### SERMON 1: COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS (1 PETER 1:3-12)

#### **Introduction**

When a person converts to Christianity, especially in the individualized West, the church often communicates that conversion is a simple transaction between a sinner and God. Sinners confess their sins, and God gives sinners eternal life in exchange. However, new Christians receive far more than eternal life at conversion. Christians also receive a rich historical and theological identity.

At first, Christians may be unaware of their new identity or its consequences and benefits. For instance, when opponents treat Christians harshly, confusion may arise, and Christians may not know how to respond. Alternatively, when facing trials, Christians may fail to grasp the extent of their salvation and the endurance it provides.

Therefore, the letter of 1 Peter addresses Christians' ignorance of who they are. First Peter 1:3-12 begins 1 Peter's first section, which expounds Christians' identity (1 Pet 1:1-2:10). The identity Peter offers is not novel by twenty-first-century standards. Neither was it novel at the time of writing. Rather than providing a new understanding of Christians' identity and their experience and purpose in the world, Peter introduces Christians to an existing biblical-theological identity already found within Scripture's pages—the identity of Old Testament Israel (1 Pet 1:1). Like their identity, Christians' place in history is also biblically-theologically oriented—the fulfillment of God's end-time promises (1 Pet 1:5). Finally, even the suffering Christian believers experience has a biblical-theological explanation—Jesus's sufferings (1 Pet 1:11). Being identified as

God's people at this point in salvation history brings expectations, challenges, and blessings. In 1 Peter 1:3-12 and the sermon below, the emphasis is on the blessings.

### Sermon 1

It is easy to show gratitude to God in good times. God's blessings are apparent when things are going well, and praising him seems easy. In tough times when God's blessings are less obvious, gratitude becomes challenging. To illustrate, there is a story of a pastor who always had something to praise God for each week during the worship service.<sup>1</sup> One Sunday, the weather was so gloomy that a congregation member wondered whether the pastor could find anything to say in praise to God. Nevertheless, the pastor, in his prayer, was undeterred. Instead, he prayed, "We thank Thee, O God, that it is not always like this." Even in challenging times, God's people have every reason to be grateful. Even gloomy days do not last forever.

### A Salvation Worthy of Praise (1:3-5)

Better days await Christians living between Jesus's first and second advents. Verses 3-5 describe the salvation Christian believers will experience. Peter describes their salvation in three ways: a living hope, a heavenly inheritance, and future salvation.<sup>2</sup> These are not descriptions of three independent realities but a singular salvation Christ-followers can anticipate receiving and experiencing in different ways.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, obtaining this salvation is not their doing but God's.

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<sup>1</sup> Maxwell Droke, ed., *The Speaker's Treasury of Anecdotes* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1948), 67. The story is widely attributed to Alexander Whyte (1836-1921), an influential Scottish pastor, but the incident is not mentioned in scholarship on his life and ministry.

<sup>2</sup> All three descriptions are prepositional phrases preceded by the preposition εἰς.

<sup>3</sup> Rightly Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2003), 63. While they are parallel descriptions, Achtemeier clarifies they are not synonyms. Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter: A Commentary on 1 Peter*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 97. Exactly how they relate to one another is disputed. For instance, Kelly argues, "Salvation denotes the object of the living hope and the content of inheritance." J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, Black's New Testament Commentaries (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 52. Schreiner believes, "The living hope of believers, according to v. 4, is their inheritance." Schreiner, *1, 2*

**God’s salvation is sure.** Peter first describes God’s salvation as a “living hope” (1:3). Hope in the Bible is not a word used lightly or in the contemporary way people often use it, as in “I hope my team wins the super bowl.” This statement, reflecting the subject matter, contains much uncertainty. However, unlike contemporary hope, “hope” used in 1:3 and the rest of Scripture is far more confident (cf. Heb 11:1). Christian hope is rooted in specific facts—namely, the truth of Jesus Christ’s resurrection from the dead.<sup>4</sup> In verse three, Peter describes the concept of hope as a “living.” Christian hope is rooted in Jesus, who is alive. Consequently, a link exists between Christian hope and Christ’s resurrection.<sup>5</sup> If Jesus is alive, Christians’ hope for salvation is alive, and better days are ahead.

Peter strengthens the certainty of salvation hoped for by Christian believers, as Jesus’s resurrection is a historical event. Because Scripture is eyewitness testimony, the events of Jesus’s death and resurrection possess credibility. By tying expectations of the future to Christ’s resurrection, Christians’ expectations become more credible, making them difficult to dismiss. Therefore, God’s salvation is not wishful thinking, mere possibility, or unsettled fact, but like Jesus’s resurrection, God’s salvation is sure.

**God’s salvation is secure.** Another way Peter describes salvation is as an “inheritance” (1:4). The concept of inheritance is not new. In the OT, the inheritance God’s people looked forward to was the Promised Land (Heb 11:8). Yet obtaining their inheritance and keeping it remained a problem. Famine, foreign invasion, and sin

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*Peter, Jude*, 63. Jobes suggests, “The chosen are given new birth into two things—hope and an inheritance—but they are also guarded by faith until salvation is fully realized at some future time.” Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 84.

<sup>4</sup> Marshall first defines Christian hope as the “conviction that something will happen in the future.” Then he insists, “But for that conviction to exist there has to be some kind of basis.” I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 37.

<sup>5</sup> Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 62.

threatened Israel's inheritance and resulted in loss or removal on more than one occasion (Deut 30:1-10; Jer 2:7). The insecurities associated with obtaining an earthly inheritance are not unique to Israel. Every inheritance kept on earth remains insecure. The only secure place for inheritance is heaven. Jesus urged his followers to "store up for yourselves treasure in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal" (Matt 6:19-20). According to Jesus and Peter, heaven is the new location of the inheritance promised to God's people (1:4). In contrast to earthly inheritances, including the Promised Land, God's promised inheritance now cannot perish or experience defilement.<sup>6</sup> Thus, an inheritance in heaven is a significant improvement, offering peace of mind for Christians.

However, the fact that Peter describes an inheritance in heaven does not mean that the inheritance is "merely spiritual" or will remain hidden from sight forever.<sup>7</sup> On the contrary, the Bible anticipates and describes a future earthly existence—a new heaven and earth comparable to the current ones, yet perfect and eternal (cf. Isa 65:17; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1-22:5).<sup>8</sup> One indication that Peter may have the new heavens and earth in mind as an inheritance, is the connection between inheritance and being "born again" (1:3). The term "born again" has deep theological roots in Jesus's teaching and OT promises of regeneration and the future inheritance of the new heavens and new earth (cf.

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<sup>6</sup> Achtemeier observes, "Given that the author has already used language to describe the Christian community which was normally used to describe Israel, one could readily understand an implied contrast here between such an inheritance and the land that had been the promised inheritance of Israel." Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 96. Elliot noting this contrast, proposes that 1 Pet gives a "nonterritorial concept" of inheritance that distinguishes it from Israel's inheritance. He notes, "The Christian focus of hope is no longer on the reacquisition of the land of Israel from its colonial overlords and the restoration of its political autonomy." John H. Elliott, *1 Peter*, The Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 37B (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 335. For a biblical-theological treatment of the development of the Promised Land in Scripture culminating in the new creation and new heaven and earth, see Oren R. Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land: The Land Promise in God's Redemptive Plan*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 34 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 150.

<sup>8</sup> Rev 21:2 describes the new heaven and new earth of Rev 22:1 as a "holy city, new Jerusalem." It is noteworthy that the inheritance 1 Pet 1:4 describes as "kept in heaven for you," in Rev 21:2 is described as "coming down out of heaven from God" and is already "prepared."

John 3:3; Ezek 36:26; Isa 43:18-19; 65:17).<sup>9</sup> As one theologian says concerning the concept of “born again,” “the language of being ‘born again’ indicates new creation.”<sup>10</sup> Being born again is an act of new creation by which God incorporates Christians into his new creation and the future new heavens and earth established through Jesus’s resurrection (cf. Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:20-23; 2 Cor 5:17). Therefore, implied in Peter’s description of Christians’ inheritance is the new heavens and earth born again Christians will one day possess.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, as with the rest of God’s salvation, the new heavens and earth await a day sometime in the future when it too will be revealed (1:5).

**God’s salvation is future.** Peter lastly describes salvation as an event that happens in the future. At times, the NT describes Christians’ salvation as a present reality (3:21). More frequently, the NT describes salvation as a future event experienced at the end of time and Jesus’s return (cf. 1 Thess 5:9; 2 Tim 2:10; Heb 5:9; 9:28).<sup>12</sup> Following the rest of the NT, an end-time concept of salvation is the perspective found throughout 1 Peter (1:5, 9, 10; 2:2).<sup>13</sup> For instance, in verse five, God’s salvation is not something Christian believers possess now but will instead possess “in the last time” (1:5). However, even as salvation remains a future event, it is at the same time “ready to be revealed.” Even as Peter’s concept of salvation is future, because of Jesus’s life, death,

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<sup>9</sup> BDAG, ἀναγεννάω, 59. BDAG translates the term as, “Beget again, cause to be born again.” The word is absent from the rest of the NT and the LXX though very similar to Jesus’s words “γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν” (born again) in John 3:3. For the argument that “born again” in 1 Pet is an allusion to Jesus’s words in John 3:3, see Jobes, *1 Peter*, 83. For the discussion that “born again” in both 1 Pet 1:3 and John 3:3 is a reference to the promised new creation and Ezek 36, see G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 324-326; 334-335.

<sup>10</sup> Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 324.

<sup>11</sup> Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 325.

<sup>12</sup> Martin Williams, *The Doctrine of Salvation in the First Letter of Peter* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 160.

<sup>13</sup> Williams, *The Doctrine of Salvation in the First Letter of Peter*, 160. Jobes observes, “Peter presents salvation as fully attained only at the final judgment, at the end of history when Jesus Christ is revealed.” Jobes, *1 Peter*, 88.



and resurrection, salvation is not a mere possibility but already achieved. All that remains to usher in the fullness of God's salvation is Jesus's return.

Admittedly, salvation's future nature is a cause for concern. Even though salvation can arrive with Jesus at any moment, until then, Christians must endure their present circumstances. Later verses describe Christians' present circumstances as difficult. They include "fiery" trials (1:6; 4:12, 17). In addition, these trials are not independent of but associated with God's judgment. In the OT, God's visitation was a time of deliverance and blessing and, simultaneously, a time of judgment (cf. Exod 14:30; Joel 2:1-2, 28-32; 2 Pet 3:10-13). Peter shares this understanding, later defining the time leading up to Jesus's second advent as the beginning of God's final judgment (4:17). Thankfully, obtaining the abovementioned salvation is not by human strength or effort but by God's work and preservation.

**God's salvation is God's work.** While Peter describes the salvation Christians anticipate receiving in the future, God is responsible for obtaining salvation. Peter's three descriptions of salvation in 1:3-12 depend grammatically on two actions.<sup>14</sup> In both instances, Peter identifies God as the instrument. In the first instance, God the Father gives Christian believers new birth, resulting in hope and inheritance (1:3). In the second, God's power is the instrument by which he preserves Christians until salvation arrives (1:5). Even as God preserves Christ-followers, God's preservation does not preclude the need for faith. Faith is necessary (1:5, 7, 9). Nevertheless, even as faith is needed, God's

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<sup>14</sup> First Pet 1:3-5 is a single sentence in Greek. The first two prepositional phrases beginning with εἰς that describe Christians' hope and inheritance result from the aorist active participle, masculine singular nominative, from ἀναγεννάω, "he has caused new birth." The third prepositional phrase beginning with εἰς σωτηρίαν (for salvation) is more complex. It has a present passive participle, masculine plural accusative, from φρουρέω, "we are being guarded." Forbes claims that "the guarding has both an obj. and subj. sense. On the obj. side, the instr. dat. ἐν δυνάμει θεοῦ shows that believers are under divine protection. . . . On the subj. side, the blessings that God has in store and the protection he offers, can be appropriated only διὰ πίστεως 'through faith.'" Greg W. Forbes, *1 Peter*, Exegetical Guide to the New Testament (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2014), 18-19.

power is the instrument by which Christian faith is “sustained until they come into their inheritance.”<sup>15</sup>

Because God is the one who saves, God is the one who deserves praise for salvation. “Blessed be” is the main verb and describes the appropriate response to God by Christians for everything he has done for them (1:3).<sup>16</sup> In fact, “Blessed be” is the main verb of all verses 3-12, making praise for God’s salvation the central theme, following other NT letter’s introductions (cf. 2 Cor 1:3; Eph 1:3).<sup>17</sup> Because of God’s actions, Christian believers have a salvation that is worthy of praise.

### **A Salvation Causing Joy and Grief (1:6-9)**

Verses 6-9 focus shifts from the future to the present.<sup>18</sup> Because Christians have salvation in the future worthy of praise, their future salvation leads to conflicting experiences in the present. On the one hand, Christians experience joy. Nonetheless, in stark contrast, many Christ-followers also experience grief. Also, the cause of the contrast is the same. Joy and grief stem not from different sources but from a singular source—God’s saving work.

**A cause for joy.** God’s salvation is a cause for joy. First Peter 1:6 says, “In this, you rejoice.” Verse six is not looking ahead but back to the truths already expounded in verses 3-5.<sup>19</sup> Christians can rejoice in their present circumstances, knowing better days are ahead. Peter, moreover, sees more than Christians’ future salvation as a cause for joy but also Jesus’s return (1:7). For Peter, Christ’s second advent and God’s salvation go

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<sup>15</sup> Williams, *The Doctrine of Salvation in the First Letter of Peter*, 162.

<sup>16</sup> “The optative of εἰμί ‘to be’ is implied rather than present in the Greek text.” Jobes, *1 Peter*, 81.

<sup>17</sup> Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 60.

<sup>18</sup> Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 99.

<sup>19</sup> Rightly Jobes, *1 Peter*, 92; Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 100.

together. There is no salvation apart from Jesus. Salvation is the “outcome of their faith” in him (1:9). Furthermore, it is at the event of Christ’s return that God’s promised salvation is received (1:9). Therefore, Christian joy is not the result of present circumstances. Joy is the response to God’s future promises and Jesus’s return.<sup>20</sup>

If there is one challenge to Christian joy, the cause of joy remains unseen.<sup>21</sup> For Peter’s audience, Jesus was unseen when they first believed in him (1:8). He had already ascended into heaven. In contrast, Peter’s audience’s struggles were palpable and ever-present, often threatening to steal their joy. Thus, Christians must learn to keep their focus on Christ even though they cannot see him. Peter addresses how Christians can “set their hope” on Jesus and their future salvation later in 1:13.<sup>22</sup> Maintaining their focus involves “preparing their minds for action” and “being sober-minded” (1:13). By focusing on Jesus and their salvation and not their suffering, Christians can maintain their trust and joy even though Jesus and salvation remain out of sight.

**A cause for grief.** Even as Christians ought to experience joy in response to God’s salvation and Jesus’s return, there is also grief. Trials and suffering are a normative part of Christians’ present experiences while they wait for their salvation. These verses are not the last time Peter addresses suffering and trials. Persecution is a significant theme addressed later in the letter (cf. 2:12, 18-25; 3:13-4:6; 4:12-19; 5:6-11). Here, Peter introduces suffering positively, matching 1:3-12’s upbeat tone.

While grief accompanies trials, trials have the essential purpose of evaluating a person’s faith (1:7). Therefore, trials are not arbitrary and have value. According to Peter, faith is precious, just as gold is precious. Continuing the comparison, as metal workers purify gold by fire, trials purify and refine faith to God’s glory (cf. 4:12). These verses

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<sup>20</sup> Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 104.

<sup>21</sup> Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 104.

<sup>22</sup> See chap. 3.

further encourage those suffering trials. First, trials are limited in length. Christ-followers suffer “now for a little while” (1:6). Christians’ suffering is not open-ended or eternal. Second, trials are not without purpose. Christian suffering is a “necessary” part of God’s plans and purposes for Christians since they test and refine faith (1:6; 3:14; cf. 4:12; Acts 14:22).<sup>23</sup>

For Christian believers experiencing trials for the first time and surprised by the grief trials cause, Peter does not want them to be unaware. Grief, like joy, characterizes Christians’ present experiences. Moreover, grief is the result of present circumstances and something more profound. Like joy, grief is also the result of God’s saving work.

**One cause, not two.** A difficulty in interpreting 1 Peter is identifying the suffering Peter’s readers are experiencing.<sup>24</sup> First Peter 1:1 addresses the letter’s recipients as “elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.” In socio-political terms, an exile is someone who has left their home to live in a foreign place, either temporarily or permanently.<sup>25</sup> Exiles often experience marginalization and persecution by those around them since they do not share the language and culture of their new home.

So, one possible cause for the grief of Peter’s audience is socio-political; Christians, perhaps ethnic Jews who were displaced from Palestine to live in Asia Minor,

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<sup>23</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 67. Grudem argues, “Peter says therefore that Christians will experience grief only as it is necessary in the light of God’s great and infinitely wise purposes for them.” Davids observes, “One could translate the phrase εἰ δέον ἐστὶν ‘since it is necessary’ as well as ‘if it is necessary.’” Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 56 n13. See also chap. 6.

<sup>24</sup> See chap. 1.

<sup>25</sup> BDAG, *παρεπίδημος*, 775. BDAG translates the term as “Pertaining to staying for a while in a strange or foreign place,” stressing the “temporary” nature of the change of location. In 2:11, Christians, along with being called *παρεπίδημοι* (“exiles”), are also called *πάροικος* (“sojourners”). BDAG, *πάροικος*, 779. BDAG translates the term as “Pertaining to being a resident foreigner,” stressing the “permanent” nature of the change of location. See Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter*, ed. Ferdinand Hahn, trans. John E. Alsup (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 66.

are experiencing hardships in their new homes.<sup>26</sup> Seen in this way, the cause of grief is distinct from the cause of joy, which Peter earlier identified as the new birth (1:3). However, Christ-followers experiencing grief are not described simply as exiles but “elect exiles” in the introduction to the letter (1:1). Peter states that Christians’ status as exiles results from God’s sovereign choice. Further, even as the term “exile” carries socio-political meaning, it has a rich theological history of describing God’s people irrespective of their literal circumstances. After all, Abraham was an exile in social-political terms. He owned little to no land and was dependent on the hospitality of others (Gen 23:4).<sup>27</sup> The writer of Hebrews identifies Abraham and the other OT Patriarchs also as “exiles” (Heb 11:13).<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, even as Abraham and the Patriarchs were literal exiles, their descendants continued to use these terms even when residing securely in their promised home. David wrote in Psalm 38:13: “Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; hold not your peace at my tears! For I am a sojourner with you, a guest, like all my fathers.”<sup>29</sup> In 1 Chronicles 29:15, when the people brought offerings to build the temple, David prayed, “For we are strangers before you and sojourners, as all our fathers were.”<sup>30</sup> By David’s time, the term “exile” and “sojourner” had surpassed their socio-political origins and had instead become a description for all the descendants of Abraham regardless of literal circumstances (cf. Lev 25:23; Ps 119:19).<sup>31</sup> From the

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<sup>26</sup> John H. Elliott, *A Home for The Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of I Peter, Its Situation and Strategy*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981).

<sup>27</sup> Abraham refers to himself as both an exile (“παρεπίδημος”) and a sojourner (“πάροικος”) in Gen 23:4 (LXX).

<sup>28</sup> “They were strangers and exiles (παρεπίδημος) on the earth (Heb 11:13).”

<sup>29</sup> “Sojourner” and “guest” are “πάροικος” and “παρεπίδημος” in Ps 38(39):13 (LXX). Goppelt, *A Commentary on I Peter*, 66.

<sup>30</sup> “Strangers” and “sojourners” are “πάροικοι” and “παροικοῦντες” in 1 Chr 29:15 (LXX).

<sup>31</sup> Goppelt, *A Commentary on I Peter*, 66.

standpoint of redemptive history, God's people remain exiles and sojourners even if they never leave their homes.

Therefore, it is possible that Peter is not addressing displaced Jews living in Gentile lands but is addressing long-standing residents of Gentile communities—even Gentiles themselves. Because God includes Gentiles in his people under the new covenant, Peter identifies them as sojourners and exiles, along with their Jewish brothers and sisters (Eph 3:6).<sup>32</sup> In this way, the cause of Christian grief is not independent of the cause for joy. Instead, joy and grief are “two sides of the same coin.”<sup>33</sup> God's election and new birth bring the promise and joy of future salvation (1:3-5) *and* trials to believers' present lives (1:6-7). As Gentile Christians adopt Christian teaching and live out their biblical convictions as long-standing residents of their communities, they experience grief from the hostility of family and neighbors. God's salvation is a source of joy *and* grief in present circumstances.

### **A Salvation Fulfilling God's Promises (1:10-12)**

The focus of verses 10-12 again shifts.<sup>34</sup> This time, the shift is from Christians' present circumstances to God's past activity and its relevance for Christian believers. The past is relevant for Christians because God's activity moves from promise to fulfillment. Furthermore, the goal of everything God did in the past was to bring about salvation. Thus, Christ-followers, regardless of present circumstances, live in the enviable time of God fulfilling his redemptive plans.

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<sup>32</sup> Goppelt notes that in early Christian writings such as *I Clement* and the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, the verb form of *πάροικος* became a standardized greeting. Goppelt, *A Commentary on I Peter*, 67.

<sup>33</sup> Reinhard Feldmeier, *The First Letter of Peter: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, trans. Peter H. Davids (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), 14-16. Feldmeier goes on to argue, “This shows that even though the address as ‘foreigners’ is determined by the societal conflict situation, *the foreignness of the Christians is not in its essence derived from protests against society, but from correspondence to God and belonging to his new society* (16).” Emphasis original.

<sup>34</sup> Achtemeier, *I Peter*, 105.

**From promise to fulfillment.** The past is relevant for Christians. In verses 10-12, Peter describes the Holy Spirit’s ministry in the past and present. In the past, the Holy Spirit’s ministry was to make predictions. The subject of the Holy Spirit’s predictions was the “sufferings and glories of Christ” (1:11). Peter says the Holy Spirit made these predictions about Jesus through God’s OT prophets as he spoke through them. Subsequently, these predictions were written down and preserved in the OT. The predictions made about Jesus by the Holy Spirit through the prophets varied in form. They included direct quotations, allusions, and shared themes and patterns.<sup>35</sup>

While Peter affirms that the OT prophets made accurate predictions about Jesus through the Spirit’s ministry, Peter states that the prophets wrote things about Christ that have only now been “announced” (1:12). Also, the prophets were “inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ was indicating” their fulfillment (1:11). Thus, even though the prophets wrote about Jesus, they did not *fully* understand everything they said.<sup>36</sup> The full extent of the Spirit’s intentions remained unfulfilled, making the prophets’ message not solely for their original audience but for future generations (1:12).

Peter identifies the intended generation of the prophets’ ministry as contemporary Christians. With the subsequent arrival of Jesus, the Holy Spirit’s ministry shifted from prediction to fulfillment. With the coming of Christ, the Holy Spirit again empowered

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<sup>35</sup> Douglas J. Moo and Andrew David Naselli, “The Problem of the New Testament’s Use of the Old Testament,” in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016),” 706. For OT citations and allusions to Jesus’s glories and sufferings in 1 Peter, see Benjamin Sargent, *Written to Serve: The Use of Scripture in 1 Peter*, The Library of New Testament Series (London: T&T Clark, 2018). First Pet frequently identifies Jesus’s sufferings with Isaiah’s predictions of the suffering servant. Sergeant notes that 1 Pet 2:22-25 includes at least four quotations and at least four further allusions to Isa 53. Sargent, *Written to Serve*, 126-30.

<sup>36</sup> Darrell L. Bock, “Evangelicals and the Use of the Old Testament in the New Part 2,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142, Oct (1985): 308. Bock believes, “They wrote things they could not have known because theological revelation had not yet developed to the point where the full thrust of God’s intention was capable of being understood by the human author.” For example, in Heb 1:5, the author of Hebrews identifies Jesus as the divine Son, saying, “For to which of the angels did God ever say, ‘you are my Son, today I have begotten you?’ Or again, ‘I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son?’” The second part of the verse is a quotation from 2 Sam 7:14. Bock argues concerning 2 Sam 7:14 and the concept of the son’s divinity, “It is not entirely clear that the Davidic Covenant by itself *at the time it was given* required a divine son for fulfillment. David thought Solomon could be that son.” Emphasis original.

human agents. Nevertheless, this time, rather than make predictions, they “preached the good news” of God’s salvation’s arrival in Christ (1:12).<sup>37</sup> However, NT preachers did not preach salvation’s arrival in a vacuum. Instead, they preached salvation as the fulfillment of the previous predictions of the OT prophets (cf. Acts 2:14-41; 17:2-3). Therefore, Christians live in the desirable time of God’s promises coming true.

The clarity with which the NT preachers proclaimed Jesus from the OT does not make Christian believers superior to prior generations. Instead, clarity is a function of their place in redemptive history. With the Holy Spirit’s help, the details of salvation history have developed enough that the *full* intent of the Holy Spirit’s predictions given through the OT prophets is now clearly seen.<sup>38</sup> As a result, even as Christians are privileged to live in the time of God’s promises’ fulfillment, they are indebted to the past. Christians’ salvation is the fulfillment and goal of the labors of the OT prophets.

**The goal of God’s promises.** The Spirit’s work in the past and present also had a goal or theme—salvation. Salvation was the subject of the prophets’ predictions and their ministries recorded in the OT (1:10). Salvation was also the subject and goal of Christian proclamation and writing in NT times (1:12). Thus, Peter identifies salvation as a central theme of the Spirit’s work across salvation history and the Old and New Testaments.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> BDAG, εὐαγγελίζω, 402. BDAG translates the term as “Bring good news, announce good news.” While “bring good news, announce good news” is the general translation of the word, it can also mean more specifically to “proclaim the divine message of salvation.”

<sup>38</sup> Moo and Naselli argue, “When God breathes out his words through the human authors, he surely knew what the ultimate meaning of their words will be, but he has not created a double entendre or hidden meaning in the words that we can uncover only through special revelation. The ‘added meaning’ that the text takes on is the product of the ultimate canonical shape, although often we can clearly perceive it only if God reveals it.” Moo and Naselli, “The Problem of the New Testament’s Use of the Old Testament,” 736.

<sup>39</sup> Even though salvation a central Scriptural theme, it is not the central theme. Schreiner argues, “By now it is common consensus that no one theme adequately captures the message of the Scriptures.” Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), xii. For a discussion of possible unifying themes or “centers” for both the OT, NT, and Scripture as a whole, see Craig L. Blomberg, “The Unity and Diversity of Scripture,” in Alexander and Rosner, *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 65-66.



Highlighting that salvation is a goal across salvation history, the prophets also prophesied “grace” (1:10). Nonetheless, the prophets’ had one goal.<sup>40</sup> Salvation and grace are not two different redemptive goals but describe God’s singular goal for salvation history. Peter’s identification of salvation with “grace” also highlights another theme of salvation history—human sinfulness and consequent judgment (cf. Gen 8:21).<sup>41</sup> Setting God’s salvation against the backdrop of sin and judgment causes Christians to appreciate God’s salvation even more.

### **Application**

The future remains unsettled or something to fear for many people today.<sup>42</sup> The takeaway from the 2019 global pandemic events is that people should loosely hold their plans and expectations. Everyone has made plans only to cancel them or make disappointing revisions. However, Christians’ and Valley Baptist Church’s approach to the future should be different. Rather than unsettled, vulnerable, or something to fear, their future, in contrast, is certain and secure. For example, Christians experiencing persecution or suffering from sickness or heartache from living in a fallen world can “rejoice” not in their suffering but in their salvation. Their focus can be on their present circumstances, which leads to despair, or their focus can be on Jesus and salvation.

Furthermore, Christians should remember that better days are ahead because of God’s actions, not their own. Apart from God’s work and power, their future would look very different from the one God secured in Christ. Even as Christ-followers must maintain their faith and endure hardship until Christ’s return, God promises to sustain

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<sup>40</sup> Williams observes that the “parallelism” between the phrases “concerning salvation” (περὶ ἡς) and “about grace” (περὶ τῆς) suggests that “the two terms are virtually synonymous in this context.” Williams, *The Doctrine of Salvation in the First Letter of Peter*, 176.

<sup>41</sup> Blomberg, “The Unity and Diversity of Scripture,” 66.

<sup>42</sup> While I typically disperse the application to listeners throughout the sermon, for this project, I opted to present the application in a consolidated manner.

them. Thus, Christians should respond to these truths and everything God has done with gratitude and praise.

Regarding present circumstances, many Christians struggle to understand persecution and the grief they cause. Some even deny the possibility that Christians can experience suffering. However, denying grief's reality fails to acknowledge many Christians living worldwide who experience grief. At a theological level, denial also fails to recognize that trials are a normative part of the Christian experience and have the positive purpose of testing faith.

Rather than seeing trials as foreign and distinct from Christian identity, Christians must recognize that persecution accompanies salvation. As a result, Christians must sympathize with other Christ-followers who experience grief. Also, when Christians experience grief, they can find comfort in knowing that joy *and* grief result from God's saving work in their lives and that trials have a positive purpose in God's plans. Thus, Christian believers can endure and stand firm under trial and remain uncompromising in their convictions.

Furthermore, many Christians are ignorant of the past and, thus, the enviable position they inhabit in God's plans. Anyone working on a puzzle knows the value of a complete picture for fitting the pieces together. Today's Christians can see how the OT predicted Jesus and how God fulfilled his plans. Seeing God's plans unfold and how the OT prophets had Christians in mind should bring a sense of privilege each time Christians open their Bibles. Many Christ-followers may wish they lived in OT times, but today is the enviable time to live.

Finally, understanding that Jesus and salvation are a theme of the entire Bible should cause Christians to grasp the Bible's meaning. The Bible is a collection of many books written by multiple authors over thousands of years, but at the same time, the Bible has one author, God himself, who, through the Holy Spirit, is fulfilling his salvific plans.

Consequently, all Scripture, including the OT, is helpful for Christian believers to understand what God is doing and to share it with others.

### **Conclusion**

There is a story of a rancher who became rich when he found oil on his property.<sup>43</sup> Rather than sell his ranch, he took all the money and put it in the bank for safekeeping. The rancher often came to the bank and said to the banker, “The grass is gone, the sheep are sick, and the water holes are dry.” Each time, the banker would take the rancher into the vault and allow the rancher to count his money. Then, after some time, the rancher would emerge from the vault and say, “The grass is green, the sheep are well, and the water holes are full.”

Facing challenging circumstances, Christians, like the rancher, can also lose perspective. Trials can lead to discouragement and confusion. However, by remembering the blessings of their salvation and what God has done, they can find encouragement and strength to stand firm, knowing that better days are ahead.

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<sup>43</sup> Ray C. Stedman, *Our Riches in Christ: Discovering the Believer's Inheritance in Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers, 1998), 65. I changed the story's details from a Native American finding gold to a rancher finding oil.

## CHAPTER 3

### SERMON 2: FIRST STEPS (1 PETER 1:13-2:3)

#### **Introduction**

As biblical history progresses, the Bible patterns later people and events after previous people and events. For example, Scripture patterns Jesus's sojourn in Egypt after Israel's sojourn in Egypt (Matt 2:15; cf. Exod 4:22). The repetition of history in the Bible is not an accident or a mere literary device used by later biblical authors. The Bible has a diversity of human authors and a single divine author—God himself (2 Tim 3:16-17). Therefore, the patterns found in Scripture are not accidental but purposeful.<sup>1</sup>

The purposeful patterning of Scripture impacts how readers understand biblical events. Earlier events in biblical history anticipate and give meaning to later events as they unfold. After all, readers understand the significance of Jesus's temptation in the wilderness by identifying Adam's and Israel's temptation as a pattern of Christ's future temptation (Gen 3:6; Num 13-14; cf. Matt 4:1-11). Jesus obeyed when tempted, whereas Adam and Israel failed to obey. Moreover, later events provide a deeper understanding of earlier events since later events are their anticipation and fulfillment. For instance, Jesus's suffering on the cross gives David's suffering a fuller meaning because David's suffering described Christ's suffering, the greater king (John 19:23; cf. Ps 22:1). Finally, later events have precedence for understanding earlier events when interpreting biblical

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<sup>1</sup> Mitchell L. Chase, *40 Questions about Typology and Allegory*, 40 Questions Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2020), 42. Typology studies how biblical events, people, and institutions serve as a pattern for other events, people, and institutions. For examples of other biblical patterns or "types," see Jason S. DeRouchie, Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli, *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, 40 Questions Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2020), 81-88.

history.<sup>2</sup> Through Jesus's obedience and suffering, we can discover the true significance of Adam and Israel's disobedience and David's suffering.

Of all the biblical patterns, Israel's exodus from Egypt is among the most significant.<sup>3</sup> The exodus is important in its own right. However, the biblical-theological significance of the exodus is that it served as a pattern for God's peoples' future deliverance by Jesus Christ.<sup>4</sup> As Peter communicates Christians' obligations in 1 Peter 1:13-2:3, he uses the imagery and language of the exodus. Because the exodus anticipated Christians' redemption, first Peter and the sermon below use the exodus to explain how Christ-followers should respond to God's salvation and the steps they must take.

## Sermon 2

The spring season brings the sight of birds building nests in trees. The nests are a hub of activity as the birds complete the nests, lay eggs, and nurture the eggs into hatchlings. As a result, the nests become empty and silent as spring turns to summer. No hatchling stays in its nest forever; eventually, the hatchling steps out and flies away from the nest, never to return (Exod 19:4). Just as a hatchling takes its first flight, every Christian who has experienced the new birth must take their first steps. First Peter 1:13-

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<sup>2</sup> I. Howard Marshall, "Counter-Response in Favor of C. H. Dodd's View," in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 210-11.

<sup>3</sup> Friedbert Ninow, *Indicators of Typology within the Old Testament: The Exodus Motif* (Frankfurt: P. Lang, 2001), 98. Ninow insists, "Various studies and surveys have called attention to the pre-eminent status of the Exodus not only within the Old Testament but also throughout the New Testament."

<sup>4</sup> Andreas J. Kostenberger and T. Desmond Alexander, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 53 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 244. Kostenberger and Alexander argue, "God's dramatic rescue of the Israelites from Pharaoh's control is exceptionally important for understanding the process of salvation that transforms them into a holy nation, enabling them to live in God's presence. The Israelites' experience, however, merely foreshadows a greater exodus that comes through Jesus Christ, involving people from all the nations of the earth."

2:3 describes five steps all Christians take, especially new believers.<sup>5</sup> The actions are not sequential, as if they must be done in some specific order. Neither are they comprehensive as if these actions are the only steps Christian believers pursue. The five commands answer this question: what is the starting point for Christians?

### **Introductory Matters: The Expectation, Logic, and Precedent for Taking Steps**

Peter's steps are expected for Christians who have experienced God's salvation—they are commands to obey. So too, they logically flow from the blessings of salvation expounded in 1 Peter 1:3-12. Finally, they also have precedent in Israel's exodus from Egypt and the exodus events.

**The expectation of taking steps.** First Peter 1:13-2:3 prescribes five main actions for Christians and the Christian community. All five are commands. First, Peter commands them to set their “hope on the grace that will be brought” to them (1:13). Second, Peter orders them to “be holy” (1:15). In the third of these imperatives, Peter prescribes that Christ-followers conduct themselves “with fear throughout the time of your exile” (1:17). Fourth, they are expected to “love one another” (1:22). Finally, Peter commands them to “long for the pure spiritual milk” (2:2). All five steps Peter gives to Christians are mandatory commands and therefore not optional.

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<sup>5</sup> Marshall, *1 Peter*, 16. Marshall emphasizes the relevance of 1 Pet for new Christians. He writes,

Consequently it would not be difficult, for example, to use this letter as a manual for a class in church membership or as preparation for baptism or confirmation. . . . Guided by this impression, a number of scholars have argued that this document is not so much a letter to persecuted Christians as the report of a sermon (or even more than one sermon) for a baptismal service, giving teaching to new converts. This interpretation of the document is not satisfactory for various reasons, but it contains an important element of truth: Teaching given repeatedly to young Christians lies at the heart of the letter. Much of the teaching is not directly and explicitly on persecution; it is basic instruction for young (and old) Christians that remain relevant in the special situation of hostility.

For a summary of traditional and catechetical material in 1 Pet, see Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 11-14.

The structure of 1:13-2:3 also emphasizes that God expects Christians to take steps. Peter does not confine his expectations to select commands strung throughout the text; instead, taking action is the structural emphasis of the entire unit. All the material of 1:13-2:12 either expounds or remains dependent upon these five commands. For example, the phrases “preparing your minds for action” and “being sober-minded” describe how to obey the imperative “set your hope fully” and are not independent actions (1:13). From the words in 1:13-2:3 to the structure itself, taking action is expected.

**The logic for taking steps.** Peter connects Christians’ expected actions to their salvation and the new birth. First Peter 1:13-2:3 begins with “therefore,” connecting all of 1:13-2:3 to what comes before it in 1:3-12.<sup>6</sup> First Peter 1:3-12 previously declared God’s blessing bestowed on Christian believers through the new birth. As a result, God’s expectations for Christians and the Christian community are not independent but are the logical response to God’s saving activity.

Peter’s use of the indicative mood in 1:3-12 followed by the imperative in 1:13-2:3, follows other such constructions in the New Testament but on a smaller scale. The Apostle Paul’s letters often contained two parts: an explanation of Christian truth and instructions on how Christ-followers should respond. (cf. Rom 1-11; 12-16). Chapters one and two of 1 Peter have a similar structure. Because God has given his people salvation through the new birth (1:3-12), Christians respond with appropriate steps (1:13-2:3).

**The precedent for taking steps.** The expectation and logic for taking action in 1 Peter, even the commands themselves, have precedent in Israel’s exodus from Egypt.

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2003), 77.

Moreover, Peter already assumes the identity of Old Testament Israel without apology for Christians (1:2; 2:9; cf. Exod 19:6; 24:8).<sup>7</sup> Thus, it is no surprise that God's ethical expectations for Israel after the exodus should also inspire ethical expectations for Christian believers.<sup>8</sup>

In 1 Peter 3:13-2:3, four of the five commands contain allusions or OT citations to the experiences or commands given to Israel before or after their exodus from Egypt.<sup>9</sup> Whereas 1 Peter 1:13-2:3 contains five steps, God gave Israel ten—the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:1-17). Like the logic of 1 Peter 1:13-2:3, Israel's steps were also a response to their deliverance from Egypt, not a condition for God's deliverance (Exod 20:1-2).

Seeing that Peter's commands have precedent in the exodus gives the steps for Christians in 1 Peter 1:13-2:3 a level of urgency. The image of Christ-followers as hatchlings leaving the nest is also a biblical image associated with the exodus and Israel's subsequent wilderness journey (Deut 32:11-12). Scripture does not depict Egypt with the positive connotations of nurturing and comfort associated with a nest. Instead, Egypt was a place of bondage and death.<sup>10</sup> In Exodus, the author described Pharaoh and the flight from Egypt with negative imagery from Genesis for the serpent and de-creation (Gen 1; 3:1; cf. Exod 7-12; Ezek 32:2).<sup>11</sup> By contrast, Exodus depicted leaving Egypt positively

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<sup>7</sup> See chap. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Theology: Exploring Diversity and Unity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 376. Commenting on the correspondence between the sprinkling of blood in Exod 19:6 and 1 Peter 1:2, Matera argues that by virtue of Jesus's blood, Christians become "the people of the new covenant, which like the covenant with Israel entails obedience."

<sup>9</sup> First Pet 2:1-3 does not contain any allusions to the exodus. However, 2:1-3 carries forward the allusion to Isa 40 in 1:22-25.

<sup>10</sup> L. Michael Morales, *Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption*, The Essential Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 50-54. Morales cites the biblical description of "going down to Egypt" (Gen 37:25) as well as Egypt's association with water (Exod 2; 14) as symbolic descriptions of Sheol, the place of the dead (cf. Gen 37:35; Jonah 2:2-9).

<sup>11</sup> P. E. Enns, "Exodus (Book)," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 147-48. Also Morales, *Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption*, 48-65.



with terms and images from Genesis depicting new creation (Gen 1:2, 9-10; 8:3-4; cf. Exod 14:20-29).<sup>12</sup>

Even as the exodus account, like 1 Peter, described new creation, the exodus was the start, not the end, of a journey culminating in the Promised Land. Therefore, Peter's message is urgent. Like Israel, Christian believers cannot remain where they are. God expects new Christians to leave their former ways behind and follow God's commands.

### **Steps Christians Must Take (1:13-2:3)**

Having described the expectation, logic, and precedent for the commands in 1 Peter 1:13-2:13, examining each action now follows. Every Christian must take the following steps in response to God's salvation: Transfer your hope, pursue holiness, be reverent, love one another, and long for the Word. Together, these steps represent a starting place for Christians who have experienced the new birth and salvation's blessings.

**Transfer your hope (1:13).** Before sinners experienced new life in Christ, the object of their hope and security was misplaced (Col 3:2). Sinners' hope was on temporal and perishable things, not the living hope, heavenly inheritance, and future salvation God made available through Jesus's resurrection from the dead (1:3-4). Consequently, one step Christ-followers must take is to transfer their hope away from perishable things and instead "set your hope fully" on God's salvation, or "grace" (1:13). God's salvation expounded in 1:3-12 is the intended object of Christians' hope and not something new altogether. Peter already identified "grace" as an identical description of God's salvation in chapter one (1:10).

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<sup>12</sup> Enns, "Exodus (Book)," 147-48. Morales, *Exodus Old and New*, 48-65.

Transferring hope away from one object and setting it on another is not automatic. If it were, verse thirteen would not also contain the preparatory actions of “preparing your mind for action” and “being sober-minded.” By including these preparatory actions, Peter reveals that transferring hope to a new object requires daily preparation, not of the body but of the mind.<sup>13</sup>

When the Israelites were preparing to leave Egypt, they were to eat the Passover meal with their tunics “girded up” into their belts so that when the time came to leave Egypt, they could depart without delay (Exod 12:11 KJV). Peter alludes to Israel's preparations for their flight from Egypt by commanding Christians to “gird up” their minds (1:13 KJV). If Christ-followers are to transfer their hope to God’s salvation, like Israel, they must put their minds into a posture of constant readiness.

Christians’ minds also must be clear or “sober-minded” (1:13). Just as drunkenness impairs the senses, leading people to misjudge reality, Christians must have a clear mind to perceive things as they truly exist. After Israel’s deliverance from Egypt, they misjudged their situation in the wilderness and Egypt, preferring Egypt to freedom in the wilderness (Num 11-12). Likewise, if Christian believers are to maintain and not abandon their hope in an unseen and unrealized salvation, they must have a clear mind. God does not intend the hope of his salvation to be separate from the hope Christians express every day. On the contrary, God intends that his salvation become the sole object of their hope and trust.

**Pursue holiness (1:14-16).** If there were an attribute to describe and characterize all that is God, the attribute is holiness. In the OT, God chose to emphasize holiness in his self-disclosure to Israel and expected holiness to characterize their lives as

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<sup>13</sup> Although the two preparatory actions are not true imperatives but participles, most commentators perceive them as functioning as imperatives and many English Bible translation render them as commands. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 77. See also 1 Pet 1:4; 2:1, 18; 3:1, 7, 9; 4:8, 10. John H. Elliott, *1 Peter*, The Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 37B (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 358.

well (Exod 19:6; Lev 19:2). God declared his expectations for holiness: “You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod 19:6). God’s expectations for holiness resulted from God dwelling in Israel’s midst.<sup>14</sup> Because of God’s holy presence, Israel was to manifest God’s holiness to the nations around them.<sup>15</sup>

By addressing Jews *and* Gentiles, Peter emphasizes that holiness remains the defining characteristic of God’s people across redemptive history. Peter calls all Christians, as members of his new covenant community, to pursue holiness using the same terminology God expected of Israel under the old covenant (1:15; 2:9; cf. Exod 19:6; Lev 19:2). Under the new covenant, the Christian community is where God’s holy presence dwells.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, like Israel, Christ-followers must exude holiness.

Living holy lives is a conscious step away from sinful actions characteristic of unbelievers. Specifically, pursuing holiness is a step away from “the passions of your former ignorance” (1:14). From Peter’s statement, pursuing holiness is a more significant step for some than others. By referencing “ignorance,” Peter has Jews *and* Gentiles in mind (cf. Eph 4:17-18). Historically, the lives of Gentiles were unholy (Eph 4:19). Unlike Jews, Gentiles lacked access to special revelation and were unaware of God’s standards of right and wrong. However, ignorance is not an excuse for God’s redeemed people. Peter expects all Christian believers, even Gentile Christians, to pursue holy lives. Christians pursue holiness, no matter how significant a step, because of God’s holy presence in and among believers (1 Cor 3:16).

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<sup>14</sup> Steven C. Barton, *Holiness: Past and Present* (New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 196. Barton observes, “As the gift of God in creation and election, they mediated God’s presence.”

<sup>15</sup> L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord: A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 37 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 209. Morales insists, “While Israel is called to keep laws, therefore, yet doing so did not make the people holy but rather prepared them to be made holy by YHWH’s presence.”

<sup>16</sup> Barton, *Holiness*, 197. Barton describes a “dislocation and relocation” of holiness from the OT to the NT. He argues that the NT’s revelation that “God was in Christ (2 Cor 5:19) signifies a development of momentous proportions” for where God’s holiness is found. Barton relocates God’s holy presence to Jesus and from Israel to the church based on how 1 Pet employs Exod 19:6 in 1 Pet 2:9-10 for Peter’s predominately Gentile audience. See also chap. 3.

**Be reverent (1:17-21).** Israel's redemption from Egypt by the miraculous hand of God was not without cost. God ransomed Israel for a price—the price of a lamb (Exod 12:13). Israel's firstborn sons would have perished along with Egypt's firstborn without the Passover lamb. Like Israel's redemption, God has also ransomed Christians at a price. Peter explains that Jesus's blood "ransomed" Christ-followers from their "futile ways of thinking inherited from their forefathers" (1:18). Peter identifies Christ's blood with the Passover lamb's blood (1:19; cf. John 1:29; 1 Cor 5:7; Rev 5:9).<sup>17</sup> Therefore, Israel's and Christians' redemption is both through sacrifice and are parallel events that share correspondence.

Nevertheless, Christian redemption is not merely a parallel event but the fulfillment and climax of the Passover. The OT and NT develop the redemptive theme of sacrifice from Abel's offering (Gen 4) to the sparing of Isaac (Gen 22) to the Passover (Exod 12), to the atonement sacrifices in the Pentateuch (Exod 29:38-42; Num 28:3-8), to the suffering servant in Isaiah (Isa 53:7), and finally to Jesus's crucifixion (John 19:29, 36; cf. Exod 12:22, 46). Peter explains that Jesus "was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest for the sake of you" (1:20). Christians' redemption by Christ's blood was always God's plan. Passover prepared for and anticipated Jesus's eventual sacrifice. His death fulfilled the exodus events and achieved an even greater ransom from sin and death (Matt 20:28).

Recognizing the significance of Jesus's death, more extraordinary than the exodus, Christian believers ought to demonstrate "fear" toward the God who ransomed them (1:17). The fear Peter commands is not terror but reverence. Christians show reverence because God sees, knows, and judges (1:17). Reverence is also appropriate

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<sup>17</sup> Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord*, 275. Morales observes, "The New Testament interprets the crucifixion through the theological lens of Passover, the first three Gospels doing so primarily in terms of Jesus's institution of the supper as the Passover meal of the new exodus on the eve of his death. Moreover, all four gospels link Jesus's death with the sparing of a criminal in connection with the feast."

because it demonstrates appreciation for Jesus’s sacrifice and the salvation it brings. Christ’s sacrifice is “precious” (1:19). As a result, Christians take the step to show reverence.

**Love one another (1:22-25).** Peter commands Christians to take the step to “love one another” in verses 22-25. Peter expects Christians’ love for other Christ-followers to be more than mere sentimentality but “sincere” and “earnest” (1:22). Christians may have expected less than a command given love’s challenging nature. Nevertheless, Peter commands love for two reasons. First, because of the new birth (1:22a, 23a). Peter knows Christian believers can fulfill the high standard of love God expects of them because of the “purification” that results from the new birth (1:22b). Second, Peter’s confidence to command love extends beyond the new birth to the origin of the new birth itself—God’s Word and the gospel message (1:23b).

God’s Word has many qualities, but endurance is the quality Peter highlights for commanding Christian love. Peter describes the “seed” of the Word as “imperishable” and “living and enduring” (1:23). Further, Peter anchors God’s Word’s endurance in a description of God’s Word found in Isaiah 40 (1 Pet 1:24-25). In Isaiah 40:7-8, Isaiah praises God’s Word for its enduring qualities. God’s Word will “remain forever,” whereas everything else “withers” and “falls” like grass and flowers. Because God’s Word is the genesis of the new birth and thus Christians’ love, Peter expects them to take the step to love others in an enduring way.<sup>18</sup>

Peter’s use of Isaiah 40 also defines the object and context for Christian love: God’s redeemed people in challenging circumstances. By citing Isaiah 40, the circumstances of the exodus continue to provide essential parallels. Isaiah 40 speaks not to God’s people’s first exodus from Egypt but to a later generation’s exodus home from

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<sup>18</sup> Elliott, *1 Peter*, 391. Elliot observes, “The certain endurance of God’s word provides the motivation for the necessary endurance of brotherly love.”

exile. Hearing Isaiah 40, God’s people in exile would have found encouragement as they waited. Similarly, Peter addresses “exiles” who faced discouragement in NT times as they lived between Jesus’s first and second advents (1:1).<sup>19</sup> Where tough times can be some of the most demanding circumstances to show love to others, God calls his people to love each other nonetheless.

**Long for the Word (2:1-3).** Peter expands on the concept of the new birth and its association with God’s Word and the gospel message to command a fifth and final step (2:1-3). Earlier, Peter said that the new birth’s origin was God’s Word. However, the gospel is beneficial for more than the creation of new spiritual life. As a mother’s milk provides the nourishment newborn babies need to grow and develop, God’s Word also nourishes Christians’ further growth in Christ and salvation.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, God’s Word, which Peter identifies as “milk,” plays a primary and irreplaceable role in salvation and sanctification (cf. 2 Tim 3:16-17). While not less than God’s written Word, Peter’s understanding of milk also encompasses the living Word—Jesus Christ.<sup>21</sup> Christ-followers are not solely nourished by God’s written Word but also through ongoing communion with Jesus (Col 3:18).<sup>22</sup>

As in 1:12-13, Peter provides a preparatory action followed by a positive command (2:1). Christians who wish to grow must first abandon vices and attitudes

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<sup>19</sup> D. A. Carson, “1 Peter,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 1022.

<sup>20</sup> Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 83.

<sup>21</sup> Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 137. Jobes argues, “Therefore, while it is not incorrect to direct Christians to the word of God in Scripture for spiritual sustenance throughout life, it is unlikely that Peter means to limit the milk metaphor exclusively to the written word of God. This would be especially true at a time before the gospel of Jesus Christ is fully and formally inscripturated in the NT.”

<sup>22</sup> John Owen explains the growth in maturity that comes from a deepening knowledge of Jesus. He states, “When by faith we have attained a view of the glory of Christ, in our contemplations on his person, we should not pass it over as a notion of truth which we assent unto,—namely, that he is thus glorious in himself,—but endeavor to affect our hearts with it, as that wherein our own principal interest doth lie; wherein it will be effectual unto the transformation of our souls into his image.” John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1862), 32.

associated with their former ways of living. Vices and attitudes such as “malice,” “hypocrisy,” and “slander” are also harmful to Christian love and unity (2:1). Peter is optimistic rather than pessimistic about the likelihood of growth despite the required changes. What Jesus and God’s Word offer Christ-followers is superior to anything they have or will experience. Also, Christians who have experienced the new birth have already “tasted” God’s Word and the goodness Jesus provides (2:3; cf. Ps 34:8). Accordingly, Peter is confident Christians will want to experience more of Christ and God’s Word and will grow as a result.

### **Application**

The commands Christians encounter in 1 Peter 1:13-2:3 are not optional today for Valley Baptist Church. However, they bind only Christian believers because they are connected to God’s salvation and made possible by the new birth. To use the language and imagery of the exodus, non-Christians who have not trusted Christ are still in bondage. Before non-Christians can obey Peter’s commands, Jesus must redeem them (cf. John 8:34, 44). On the other hand, Christians redeemed by Christ’s blood cannot stay in “Egypt” anymore. They must leave their former ways behind, never to return to them.

As for the steps themselves and the first step of transferring hope, Christians today must remain aware of the objects they trusted before Jesus saved them. Their hope and trust must rest in Jesus and his salvation alone. However, fully trusting Christ and his salvation is not automatic. Christians can only treasure Christ and his gifts if they wake up every day prepared and clear-minded to make Christ and his gifts their true and lasting treasure.

Concerning the step to pursue holiness, some Christian believers exhibit unholiness with little desire or motivation to change. Their apathy towards holiness betrays a misunderstanding of God’s character and their identity as the people where God’s presence dwells on earth. Christians must examine their lives and ask themselves

where their lives do and do not conform to God's holiness and make changes.

Nonetheless, they make changes to their lives not to earn God's favor but because they have an appreciation for the character of God and recognize the responsibility that comes with being God's dwelling place.

Regarding showing reverence toward Jesus, grasping the costliness of his death ought to bring reverence to Christians' lives. As Israel would have remained enslaved without the Passover sacrifice, Christians would remain enslaved without Christ. Therefore, because God redeemed Christ-followers, irreverence is out of place. Glibness and disrespect of Christ's sacrifice demonstrate a lack of understanding of salvation's actual cost. Over time, Christians can lose perspective and forget salvation's cost. As a result, they must always keep the price Jesus paid for their redemption at the forefront of their minds.

As for the step to love one another, Peter commands Christians to love their spiritual family—the church. Today, it has become acceptable to identify as a Christian and yet not commit to and love a local congregation. No church is perfect, including Valley Baptist Church. However, Christian believers have no credible excuse to avoid loving God's family in an enduring way. Because of the new birth and the gospel's enduring nature, they can love imperfect people and experience love in return.

Finally, longing for God's Word and having a living relationship with Jesus Christ is not the minimum requirement necessary for salvation but a step Christians take to experience growth. Fighting sin, developing healthy relationships, and reaching lost people are not the result of programs or gimmicks. Instead, spiritual growth and health result from an ongoing relationship with Jesus and a steady diet of God's Word. Today's Christians have more access to Scripture and more time for Jesus than previous generations. Nevertheless, Christ and God's Word remain ineffectual if Christians are not hungry for them.



## **Conclusion**

God redeemed Israel from Egypt. Nevertheless, God's people did not stay in Egypt but took a step toward the future God had for them. In the same way, Christians redeemed by Jesus also cannot remain where they are. Like Israel, they must take steps to change and grow. For some, the journey is just the beginning; for others, the departure was some time ago. What is vital for Christ-followers today is to keep moving forward!

## CHAPTER 4

### SERMON 3: GOD'S BUILDING PROJECT (1 PETER 2:4-10)

#### **Introduction**

The Bible offers many benefits to readers. For instance, the Bible answers questions about God and the world he created. The Bible also leads people to Christ since the Bible explains the way to salvation. Still others receive from the Bible a list of guidelines for avoiding sin and living a life pleasing to God.

What readers may overlook is that the Bible also reveals God's mission: his "purpose" and "goals" for the world he made.<sup>1</sup> God's mission for the world is not limited to any part of the Bible but is a central theme of all Scripture.<sup>2</sup> From Genesis to Revelation, God desires to dwell in his creation and for his presence to fill the world he made (Gen 1:28; cf. Rev 21:3).<sup>3</sup> Even though sin spoiled God's creation, God's purpose remained. However, redemption was required to restore creation as a fitting place for God's presence. Therefore, the Bible records God's mission to redeem creation as his dwelling place.

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 23. Wright defines mission as "all that God is doing in his great purpose for the whole creation and all that he calls us to do in cooperation with that purpose." Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 25.

<sup>2</sup> See Wright, *The Mission of God*; Jason S. DeRouchie, Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli, *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, 40 Questions Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2020), 273-83.

<sup>3</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 25. Beale's thesis is that "the Old Testament tabernacle and temples were symbolically designed to point to the cosmic eschatological reality that God's tabernacling presence, formerly limited to the holy of holies, was to be extended throughout the whole earth."

The mission the Bible reveals is that God will save first a person and then a family—Abraham and Israel (Gen 12:1-3). Then, God would demonstrate his presence through their testimony and ethical living, drawing other nations into his redemptive work (Gen 12:1-3; Exod 9:6; 1 Pet 2:9-10). While the Bible describes salvation and sets forth ethical expectations, these are not independent of God’s mission. God uses the people he saves and their ethical living to redeem the world.<sup>4</sup>

First Peter 1:1-2:3 so far has expounded Christians’ salvation and God’s expectations for them, patterned after the salvation and expectations Israel received in their exodus from Egypt. Nevertheless, God has not saved Christ-followers or called them to holiness for their own sake. Just as he saved Israel, God saved Christians to redeem creation. First Peter 2:4-10 and the sermon below continue to explain the identity of Christian believers developing a growing awareness of how God will accomplish his redemptive mission through them.

### **Sermon 3**

Driving by a construction site, a passerby can see a building’s shape and identify the building’s purpose. Although, there was a time when the structure was a pile of bricks and boards. In the building’s early days, observers would not have been able to identify the building’s shape. They might have wondered as they drove past, “What building are they creating? What purpose will it have?”

God is building something today, but what he is creating is not a structure consisting of bricks and boards. Observers will not be able to identify God’s plans by sight. Thankfully, 1 Peter 2:4-10 reveals God’s plans. The Apostle Peter wrote 1 Peter for Christians experiencing persecution because of their commitment to Christ. Their commitment had cost them friends, reputation, and livelihood. Because of these

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<sup>4</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 389.

challenges, Christ-followers may have questioned whether their commitment was worth suffering for or would amount to anything. On the contrary, 1 Peter 2:4-10 reveals that God's plans for the world include Christians. Because of their relationship with Jesus Christ, they participate in God's redemptive work.

### **A New Temple for God's Presence (2:4-8)**

Peter reveals that the structure God is building is another temple.<sup>5</sup> The terms and descriptions he uses: "house," "priesthood," "sacrifices," "stone," and "cornerstone" together identify the structure God is building as a temple (2:4-8).<sup>6</sup> The OT used the first three terms to describe the temple or temple practices (1 Kgs 8:6, 18, 62). The last two terms, "stone" and "cornerstone," are not associated in the OT with the temple but are instead associated with God and his Messiah. Nevertheless, the OT credits God and his Messiah with building another temple (1 Chr 17:10-14).<sup>7</sup> Therefore, 1 Peter 2:4-8 encourages Christians with the identity of God's new temple fulfilled in Jesus, God's Messiah. Christ-followers can understand God's new temple from the following truths: First, God's new temple is different from his previous temples. Second, Jesus anticipated God's new temple in his teaching, and as Messiah, is the new temple's cornerstone.

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<sup>5</sup> See Andrew M. Mbuvi, *Temple, Exile and Identity in 1 Peter* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 70-126.

<sup>6</sup> Mbuvi, *Temple, Exile, and Identity*, 91. Mbuvi observes, "Only here, in the entire NT, are the three elements of temple, priesthood, and sacrifices mentioned together, making the cultic context and intention unquestionable."

<sup>7</sup> First Peter 2:4-8 employs three OT citations, all referring to a "stone" or "cornerstone" (2:6; cf. Isa 28:16); (2:7; cf. Ps 118:22); (2:8; cf. Isa 8:14). Oswalt argues that the "stone" and "cornerstone" in Isa 28:16 are most likely not the temple and could have a wide range of meaning such as God's "saving work" or "Yahweh's promise." John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 518. Isa 8:14 and Ps 118:22 do not identify the "stone" or "cornerstone" with an object but a person. In Isa 8:14, the person is Yahweh. In Ps 118:22, the person is an unidentified worshipper, perhaps David, who praises God for saving him from his enemies. Jobes observes that by the time of the NT, Jewish interpretive tradition understood the stone as the Messiah and that all the NT citations of Ps 118:22, Isa 8:14, and Isa 28:16 recognize the stone as Jesus Christ. Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 147.

Finally, Christians comprise God's new temple and, as priests, further the temple's purpose on earth.

**God's previous temples.** God's first temples were physical structures or places. The tabernacle, Jerusalem's temples, and the garden of Eden were material structures or places. Identifying Eden as a temple is not explicit, but Ezekiel 28:13 and 18 identified Eden as one of the "sanctuaries" of God. Also, Eden was where God's presence dwelled, just as his presence dwelled in the tabernacle and the first Jerusalem temple.<sup>8</sup> One theologian defines a temple "as the place where God's glorious presence was manifested on earth to his people."<sup>9</sup> God is present everywhere, but he manifested his presence in his sanctuaries: Eden, the tabernacle, and Solomon's temple.<sup>10</sup>

Other similarities exist between God's OT sanctuaries.<sup>11</sup> For example, Eden was on a mountain, just like the Jerusalem temple (Ezek 28:14). A person entered Eden from the east as a person entered the tabernacle and later temples (Gen 3:24; cf. Ezek 40:6). Also, one of Adam's tasks in Eden was to serve God by "keeping" the garden (Gen 2:15). The book of Leviticus used the same term for the priests "guarding" the tabernacle (Num 3:7-8).

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<sup>8</sup> It does not appear that God's presence ever filled the second Jerusalem temple as his presence filled Solomon's temple before it was destroyed.

<sup>9</sup> Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 276. See also J. Daniel Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle: A Study of God's Dwelling Places from Genesis to Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016).

<sup>10</sup> Beale argues that the ark of the covenant placed in the tabernacle and temple "represented the special manifestation of God ruling presence that extended from heaven to earth. The ark is repeatedly called God's 'footstool' (1 Chr 28:2; Ps 99:5; 132:7). The Israelites pictured God to be sitting on the throne in heaven with his feet extending to the ark as his footstool in the earthly temple." Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 113.

<sup>11</sup> For these and other comparisons between Eden, the tabernacle, and the temple, see L. Michael Morales, *Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption*, The Essential Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 98-100; Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 66-75; T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013), 31-42.

With Eden as the prototype, God also desired to expand his presence worldwide through his future sanctuaries. In Eden, God had commanded Adam and Eve to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen 1:28). Since the garden was a sanctuary, expanding the garden would extend God’s presence in the world.<sup>12</sup> Sadly, Eden and God’s other temples became places of sin and idolatry. Destroyed or abandoned in exile, they were not where God’s holy presence remained or expanded to the rest of creation.

**God’s new temple differs from previous sanctuaries.** All of God’s first sanctuaries were physical structures and places. Although they were defiled, God’s desire for a place for his presence to dwell on earth remained. Following the first temple’s destruction, his prophets began to speak of another temple—a grander and more glorious temple than the first (cf. 1 Chr 17:14; Ezek 37:26; Hag 2:9). Unlike God’s former sanctuaries, this new temple would last forever. Furthermore, God would no longer restrict his presence to an inner sanctuary but would expand his presence beyond the temple walls (Jer 3:16-17).<sup>13</sup>

After the exile, many hoped the second temple built in Jerusalem would fulfill the prophets’ expectations, but it never did before its destruction in AD 70. Nevertheless, God’s desire to dwell in his creation remained. First Peter 2:4-8 reveals that the new temple prophesied by the prophets was not the replacement temple or even a physical structure like God’s previous sanctuaries (cf. Eph 2:20). Instead, the new temple is alive, comprised of people who “are being built up as a spiritual house” (2:5). Thus, the place

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<sup>12</sup> Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 83. Beale asserts, “In light of Gen 1:26-28 this meant that the presence of God, which was initially limited to the garden temple of Eden, was to be extended throughout the whole earth by his image bearers, as they themselves represented and reflected his glorious presence and attributes.”

<sup>13</sup> Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 112-13.

where God manifests his presence in the world is no longer a garden or a building. God manifests his presence on earth today in people—flesh and blood.

**Jesus anticipated the new temple.** The section below describes who comprises God’s new temple. Before identifying them, it is essential to note that Jesus anticipated a shift to a nonstructural temple in his teaching.

In the Gospels, Jesus anticipated the new temple.<sup>14</sup> In John 4, Jesus encountered a Samaritan woman. During their conversation, she inquired about the appropriate place of worship—whether the site was Jerusalem or Samaria. She assumed that God required a structural temple for worship. However, Jesus did not share her assumption. He said, “But the hour is coming, and is now here when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father” (John 4:23). Jesus identified a shift in what God was doing away from temples “made with hands” that all along were inadequate to contain God’s presence (Acts 17:24; cf. 1 Kgs 8:27). In addition, by saying the shift is “coming” and at the same time “here” Jesus associated the change with his life and ministry.<sup>15</sup>

Jesus also prepared his disciples to recognize and accept the transition to a non-structural temple. Like everyone else, the disciples only knew a world with a structural place of worship. At one point in Jesus’s ministry, one of his disciples praised the temple’s magnificence (Mark 13:1). In response, Jesus stated, “Not one of these stones will be left upon the other” (Mark 13:2). Later, Jesus was accused of claiming, “I

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<sup>14</sup> Mbuvi observes that “the NT understanding of the temple as spiritual seems to stem more from the words of Jesus recorded in Mark and John than from any other source.” Mbuvi, *Temple, Exile and Identity*, 94.

<sup>15</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 224. Carson argues,

This oxymoron is a powerful way of asserting not only that the period of worship ‘in spirit and truth’ is about to come and awaits only the dawning of the ‘hour,’ i.e. Jesus’s death, resurrection and exaltation, but also that this period of true worship is already proleptically present in the person and ministry of Jesus before the cross. This worship can take place only in and through him: he is the true temple (2:19-22), he is the resurrection and the life (11:25).

will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands” (Mark 14:58).<sup>16</sup> With these statements, Jesus prepared his listeners for a transition to a nonstructural temple. Understandably, Jesus’s predictions were distressing. Without a temple, where would sinners go to have their sins forgiven? Where would they make sacrifices? Where would they offer prayers?

Jesus predicted the end of the structural temple. Nevertheless, he also spoke and prepared his disciples for what would take its place—the new temple. In John 2:19, Jesus described his crucifixion and death with temple language: “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” His listeners were confused, but Jesus was not identifying a structural building. Instead, “He was speaking about the temple of his body” (John 2:21).

**Jesus is the cornerstone of the new temple.** Jesus identified himself as the new temple, and Peter identifies Jesus as its “cornerstone” (2:7). Peter’s “stone” and “cornerstone” descriptions are OT citations from Psalms and Isaiah (Ps 118:22; Isa 8:14; 28:16). By NT times, readers understood these OT texts to anticipate God and his Messiah who would build another temple (cf. 1 Chr 17:14). Indeed, in the NT and 1 Peter, “stone” and “cornerstone” are associated with the new temple’s foundation (cf. Eph 2:20).

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<sup>16</sup> The statement attributed to Jesus is described in Mark 14:57 as “false testimony.” However, France argues,

By wording it in this way Mark has gone much further than a hostile witness is likely to have wanted or indeed been able to go, and has woven into the (false) charge a (true) statement of what was by his time a significant theme in Christian preaching and apologetics, the theme of a new sanctuary. . . . with the implication that God’s presence is no longer located in a building but in his people both individually and, more often, corporately. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 606-7.



A cornerstone was the first stone used to construct a new building in ancient times. Therefore, the construction of God's new temple, 1 Peter says, began with Jesus Christ, God's Messiah. Jesus is the "cornerstone" of God's new temple. John 1:14 says of Jesus, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." John describes Christ's incarnation using the same language used for God's presence dwelling in the tabernacle (John 1:14; cf. Exod 25:8).<sup>17</sup>

To summarize, God manifested his presence on earth in Jesus as in his previous sanctuaries. Sinners find forgiveness, make atonement for sin, and direct prayers to God in Jesus and no longer in a building (Mark 2:10; John 16:23; 1 John 2:2). Furthermore, because Christ is the cornerstone of God's new temple and the beginning of God's redemptive plans for the world, accepting or rejecting Jesus is significant. Reflecting the warnings of the OT "stone" and "cornerstone" passages, Peter sees no neutral ground regarding Jesus. To "come" to the risen Jesus leads to "honor" (2:6-7). Peter addressed Christians who had committed to Christ. Not only have they committed to Jesus, but they were suffering due to their commitment. However, their suffering was worthwhile because of Jesus's significance in God's redemptive plan. By committing to Jesus, they welcomed God's presence in the world.

Seeing Christ's acceptance or rejection through the lens of God's redemptive plan also helps Christ-followers understand their opponents' unbelief and the persecution Christians experience from them. Because opponents "stumble" and reject Christ, by default, they reject God's redemptive purpose and forfeit honor (2:8). Further, Christian

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<sup>17</sup> Carson affirms, "Whether the allusion in John 1:14 is to the tabernacle or to the tent of meeting, the result is the same: now, the Evangelist implies, God has chosen to dwell amongst his people in a yet more personal way, in the Word-become-flesh." Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 127.

believers can find comfort in knowing that God anticipated their opponents' unbelief in the OT and, thus, the suffering and rejection Christians experience from them.

**Christians are the new temple.** God's presence was manifested on earth in Jesus as God's new temple's cornerstone. However, God also manifests his presence in all who trust in Jesus's name. Verse five says of Christians, "You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." With the coming of Christ, God also manifests his presence in Christ-followers. Other NT texts attest that God's dwelling on earth is in Christians (cf. 1 Cor 3:16; Eph 2:19-22).<sup>18</sup>

Understanding Christians as a temple brings a proper perspective on the purpose of their lives. As God's new temple, Christian believers have a role in the world's redemption. Since a temple's purpose is to serve as a place where God manifests his presence, Christians' purpose is to manifest God's presence to those around them. They are to represent God and see his presence extend worldwide.

One way Christ-followers expand God's presence is by performing their priestly duties of offering sacrifices (2:5, 9). By contrast, just as the new temple is no longer a physical temple but a "spiritual house," so the sacrifices are no longer animal sacrifices but "spiritual sacrifices": prayers and praises expressed through worship and personal devotion to God (Rom 12:1; Phil 4:18; Heb 13:15).<sup>19</sup> As priests, God calls all Christians to expend their lives in service and devotion to him. While offering sacrifices and prayers was the function of OT priests, God did not limit such work to priests. All Israel exercised a priestly function as a "kingdom of priests" (Exod 19:6). Thus, all Israel was to serve God for the sake of others. Through Israel's devotion, God planned to draw

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<sup>18</sup> The NT also recognizes each Christian individually as a "temple of the Holy Spirit" in 1 Cor 6:19.

<sup>19</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 49 (Waco, TX: Word, 1988), 101-2.

others to himself. Similarly, God desires Christians to draw non-Christians to himself through priestly devotion at home, work, and in their communities. Christian believers are essential in expanding God's new temple and, therefore, God's presence in the world (cf. Matt 5:14-16).<sup>20</sup>

**Conclusion.** Hearing Peter's words read for the first time ought to encourage Christians. Though experiencing persecution, they have a role in what God does today through accepting Jesus Christ. Beginning with Jesus, God is building a new temple for his presence. As God and Messiah, he is the promised "stone" and its foundation. God also manifests his presence in Christ-followers, incorporating them through Jesus into a dwelling place for himself. By nature of their calling as priests, like Israel before them, Christians can draw others to Jesus through priestly worship and devotion.

### **A New People for God's Witness (2:9-10)**

In addition to building a new temple for his presence, God calls a new people for his witness. Verses 9-10 shift from describing Christians as a temple to describing them in sociological terms: "race," "priesthood," "nation," and "people." In 2:9-10, Peter continues to encourage Christian believers by explaining their identity and purpose in the world. Christians can understand their God-given identity and purpose by understanding three things: first, God chose Abraham and Israel to be his people, second, Abraham and Israel had a special calling and mission, and finally, Jesus and Christians continue the calling and mission of Abraham and Israel in new ways.

**Abraham's and Israel's calling.** When the Bible describes election, the Bible sometimes describes election individually. As an illustration, one individual God chose

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<sup>20</sup> Even as the NT identifies Christian believers as the new temple, God's presence on earth in Christians is not the temple's final expanded form. Rev 21 pictures the new heaven and new earth as the final temple where God's presence dwells (Rev 21:1-2; cf. 21:22). See Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 365-73.

was Abraham (Neh 9:7). God chose Abraham to make a second “new start” after Adam.<sup>21</sup> God previously had chosen Noah to make a new start (Gen 6:8). However, Noah, like Adam before him, subsequently failed (Gen 9:18-11:9). As a result, God chose Abraham to make another start (Gen 12:1-3). To think that Abraham was more worthy than Noah is false. God’s election of Abraham was an act of mercy. The human heart had not changed in its inclination to sin after the flood (Gen 8:21). Also, when God chose Abraham, Abraham was an idolator (Josh 24:2). Yet despite Abraham’s idolatry and sin, God still chose him.

In addition to choosing Abraham, God also chose Abraham’s offspring. Election in the Bible is individual and corporate. In Abraham, God elected a family to carry out his purposes. God told Abraham that God would accomplish his plan “in your offspring” (Gen 22:17-18). Therefore, Israel, Abraham’s offspring, was unique among the world’s nations. They were God’s “chosen people,” a people God “formed for himself” (Deut 7:6; Isa 43:21).

Abraham’s offspring retain the designation of God’s chosen people forever. After Abraham and his offspring, God reveals no additional “new starts” as there were after Noah.<sup>22</sup> God would accomplish his purposes for the world through Abraham’s descendants. Nevertheless, like Abraham, the nation of Israel was far from perfect. Their rebellion sometimes resulted in God withdrawing his mercy and their designation as chosen. For example, at God’s direction, the prophet Hosea named his children “No Mercy” and “Not My People,” symbolically for Israel (Hosea 1:6-9). In fulfillment of Hosea’s prophecy, Israel experienced what it was like to live apart from God’s mercy and

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<sup>21</sup> Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 284.

<sup>22</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 283.

their status as God's chosen people. Yet Israel's loss of mercy and special status was always temporary. God's mercy and election were irrevocable (Hosea 1:9-10; 2:23).

**Abraham's and Israel's mission.** When God called Abraham, he called him for the benefit of others. God would make Abraham great so that he would "be a blessing" (12:2). Further, Abraham's blessing would bless all nations (Gen 12:3). God's redemptive plan, encompassing human sin (Gen 3), redemption (Gen 3:15), and worldwide salvation (Isa 49:6), forms the backdrop for Abraham's mission of "blessing." God would bring salvation from sin and death to the world through Abraham.<sup>23</sup>

God actualized his promise to Abraham of worldwide salvation first in Israel, Abraham's descendants. When God established his covenant with Israel, he designated them as a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:6). This designation reflected God's very character. Because God was holy and dwelled in Israel's midst, the nation of Israel would take on the identity and duties of a nation associated with a holy God (Lev 11:44).

The designation of Israel as a "kingdom of priests and holy nation" was more than a designation of their identity. The description also stipulated Israel's mission to bring worldwide "blessing" to the nations. However, their mission was not to "go and tell" but to "come and see."<sup>24</sup> Through holy living and faithfulness to God, God intended Israel to be an attractive witness to the nations around them, drawing them to him. Unfortunately, Israel failed. Rather than being a blessing, they became a curse in God's

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<sup>23</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 284. Gentry and Wellum observe, "The fact that the blessing to the nations through Abraham and his family included dealing with sin and death caused by the first Adam is not *plainly* stated until much later, such as in the passages related to the suffering servant in Isaiah." Emphasis original.

<sup>24</sup> Jason S. DeRouchie, Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli, *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, 40 Questions Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2020), 276. DeRouchie argues that Israel's calling "does not appear to have included the 'go and tell' mission that Christians now have. Instead, Israel's limited 'mission' to the nations involved only a calling to 'come and see.'"

eyes and the eyes of the world (Zech 8:13). Rather than being light in the darkness and serving as a witness before the world, Israel succumbed to idolatry and wickedness.

**Jesus's calling and mission.** As God's desire for the temple remained unchanged with Israel's failure, God's desire to bring salvation to the world through his chosen peoples' witness did not change. During Israel's exile, the prophets began to speak even more explicitly of God's mission of worldwide salvation from sin and death (Isa. 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12).<sup>25</sup> Although this time, the mission was not a mission of "come and see," but also of "go and tell."<sup>26</sup> God planned to bring salvation to the "ends of the earth" (Isa 42:6). Conversely, the prophets designated this mission not to the nation but to an Israelite whom God would call to this important task: "the servant of the Lord" (Isa 49:5-6).<sup>27</sup>

As the OT gave way to the NT and Jesus's incarnation and ministry, Jesus picked up where Israel failed. As God's "Son," Jesus was the true Israel who fulfilled the "come and see" mission and calling given to Israel (Matt 2:15; cf. Hos 11:1).<sup>28</sup> For

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<sup>25</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 284.

<sup>26</sup> See DeRouchie, Martin, and Naselli, *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, 278; Andreas J. Kostenberger and T. Desmond Alexander, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 53 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 26.

<sup>27</sup> T. Desmond Alexander, *The Servant King: The Bible's Portrait of the Messiah* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2003), 108-9; Kostenberger and Alexander, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, 29. Alexander suggests a distinction between Israel and the servant in Isaiah 49:5-6. He writes,

These comments clearly distinguish the servant from the nation of Israel, for he is described here as the one through whom God will restore Israel to himself. Moreover the servant's role is not restricted to helping only Israel, he will perform a similar duty for the nations of the earth. Yet, while the servant is someone other than the nation, a close correspondence is drawn between them; indeed, the servant is called 'Israel' in Isaiah 49:3.

See also Matthew S. Harmon, *The Servant of the Lord and His Servant People: Tracing a Biblical Theme through the Canon*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 54 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 122-23. Harmon also identifies a distinction in Isaiah's description of God's servant, where on the one hand, Isaiah describes the nation of Israel, and on the other, he describes an individual (Isa 42; cf. Isa 49). Harmon argues, "The fact that the servant is identified as Israel (49:3) yet has a mission to restore Israel indicates that the servant of Isaiah 49 is not the nation. Nor can it be a faithful remnant within the nation, for the servant is restoring them ('the preserved of Israel' 49:6) as well. The servant, then, must be an individual, a person who as the servant embodies everything Israel was supposed to be but failed."

<sup>28</sup> Benjamin L. Merkle, *Discontinuity to Continuity: A Survey of Dispensational and Covenant Theologies* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 129.

example. Jesus draws through his obedience to God and his death on the cross, “all men to himself” (John 12:32). Moreover, Jesus identified himself as God’s servant, bringing salvation to Israel and the ends of the earth (Luke 2:32; 4:18-19; cf. Isa. 42:6; 49:6-9; 61:1-2).<sup>29</sup> Finally, while Jesus focused his ministry on Jews, the universal nature and scope of his mission were never in doubt (John 10:16). Following his death and resurrection, Jesus embarked on a “go and tell” mission through his disciples, reaching “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

**Christians’ calling and mission.** Tracing God’s worldwide salvation mission through Abraham and Israel to Jesus demonstrates that God is calling a new people for his witness. However, God’s calling does not stop with Jesus. Peter designates Christians with Israel’s calling and mission in verse nine. Christ-followers are a “chosen race,” a “holy nation,” and a “people for his own possession” (2:9; cf. Exod 19:6; Isa 43:20). Peter describes Christian believers using the same terms used for Israel in the OT. Nevertheless, they have not replaced Israel. Instead, Christians’ election and mission are derivative of their union with Christ.<sup>30</sup> Since Jesus is the true Israel, Christians continue Israel’s mission solely through their relationship with him.

Because Christians’ mission is derivative of their relationship with Jesus, Gentile Christ-followers now have the privilege of participating in the mission God gave Israel. First Peter teaches that God’s mission to the ends of the earth is a shared mission of *both* Jewish and Gentile Christians. As a result, Peter says to his primarily Gentile audience that though once “not a people,” by nature of their union with Christ, they are now “God’s people” (2:9; cf. Hos 1:10). Similarly, they have also “received mercy” (2:9 cf. Hos 1:7).

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<sup>29</sup> Kostenberger and Alexander, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, 247.

<sup>30</sup> Merkle, *Discontinuity to Continuity*, 130.

The missional nature of Christians, a derivative of Jesus’s mission through their union with him, is both attractional to “come and see” and to “go and tell.” As a result, Christians continue God’s mission of redemption in new ways. Peter reveals that as “a royal priesthood” and “a holy nation,” their purpose is to “proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (2:9; cf. Isa 43:21). Peter’s description of proclamation is from Isaiah 43:21. Using Isaiah’s words, Peter identifies Christians’ proclamation with Israel’s “come and see” mission. As Christ-followers declare God’s mighty deeds in worship, it serves as an attractional witness to the nations (Matt 5:14). Nevertheless, Peter is also presenting a new outward mission to “go and tell,” reflecting Christians’ union with Jesus, who as Isaiah’s servant assumed a “go and tell” mission to the nations.”<sup>31</sup> Because of their union with Jesus, Christian believers continue the “go and tell” mission of Jesus by going and declaring God’s mighty deeds to all nations (Matt 28:18-20).

**Conclusion.** Christians experiencing suffering can rejoice that, like Israel before, God has chosen them and set his mercy on them. God’s election and mercy are encouraging for Gentile believers whom God previously excluded from his saving plan. Christ-followers experiencing persecution can also rejoice that God still wants to bless all the families of the earth, including their persecutors. This mission of blessing all nations continues today through the true Israel, Jesus Christ. God’s mission also continues through Christians as God incorporates them into Jesus with the dual purpose of drawing others to him through their holy lives and gospel proclamation.

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<sup>31</sup> John H. Elliott, *1 Peter*, The Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 37B (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 439; Mark Boyley, “1 Peter: A Mission Document?,” *The Reformed Theological Review* 63, no. 2 (2004): 80-84. Boyley observes,

Limiting the proclamation of 1 Peter to a ‘come and see’ mission is understandable given the context in Isaiah we have just outlined, where the praises are before but not explicitly specified as to the nations. Yet, in Christ Jesus the ministry of the Servant has arrived and the ‘new thing’ has been accomplished in the gospel. We ought not be surprised, then, if obedience to this vision overflows the Old Testament terminology. Thus many have understood this verse to refer to evangelism.



## **Application**

If Jesus is the cornerstone of God's new temple and the foundation of what God is doing in this world, Valley Baptist Church must treasure Jesus Christ. God has his building project, but other competing and alternative projects also exist. Since the Tower of Babel, people have been building alternative structures that oppose God and his purposes. The idolatry of self, career, relationships, and wealth represent competing endeavors people construct their lives around. Jesus warned about the inevitable destruction of endeavors built on other foundations (Matt 7:26-27). Only people who build their lives on Jesus Christ and his teaching will endure.

Because God manifests his presence in Jesus and Christians, Christ-followers manifest God's presence wherever they go: in their home, workplaces, and communities. Wherever God's people are, God is. Often, the assumption is that pastors or ministry leaders continue the OT priestly duties. However, as with Israel, all Christian believers share a priestly calling of service to God. As they go about their daily lives, every Christian can bring glory to God through their words and actions (Col 3:17).

Shifting from Christians' identity as God's temple to their identity as God's chosen people, one of the realizations they need to have is that God chose them. The realization that God chooses brings gratitude and amazement but also responsibility. Like Abraham and Israel, the expectation of representing and carrying out God's plan accompanies God's call. Unfortunately, sometimes Christians are ignorant of the role bestowed on them with their salvation. Their confusion leads Christians to adopt roles contrary to God's desires, leaving God's plans unfinished.

Nevertheless, Christian believers have no reason to be confused about their purpose. Their purpose is the ongoing mission of God's people, given first to Abraham and Israel and continued through Jesus Christ and his followers. Therefore, knowing God's plans helps Christians accept their God-given role and take responsibility for completing God's plan for the world. Knowing God's plans also brings with it a deep

sense of humility. Like Abraham and Israel, Christians do not merit the responsibility to conduct God's purposes in the world. The responsibility results from God's mercy and grace. Christ-followers should feel amazed that God dwells in them and uses them to bring salvation to the world.

### **Conclusion**

God is building a new temple for his presence and a new people for his witness. First Peter 2:4-10 is a fitting conclusion to the letter's first section (1:3-2:10). The rich blessings Christians inherit from Jesus Christ are not independent of God's mission. Peter solidifies Christian identity and provokes missional aspirations for those living between Jesus's first and second advents. Like Abraham and Israel before them, Christians have a job to do!

## CHAPTER 5

### SERMON 4: GOOD NEIGHBORS (1 PETER 2:11-3:12)

#### **Introduction**

A person's greatest privilege is to serve God and his purposes. Serving God is a recurring theme in biblical history. The Bible identifies Abraham, Moses, David, and others as God's servants (Gen 26:24; Num 12:7; Ezek 34:23-24).<sup>1</sup> Scripture also recognizes Israel as a servant (Isa 41:9; 42:1; 43). Being God's servant and fulfilling God's purposes go together. When Isaiah spoke of God's plan to bring salvation to the ends of the earth, he assigned the mission to a "servant" (Isa 40-66). Serving God also required sacrifice. God would accomplish worldwide salvation, not through an act of power but through subordination, humiliation, and loss. The servant of Isaiah 53 was "despised" as he accomplished God's redemptive work (Isa 53:3).

Among God's many servants, Jesus was the "servant par excellence."<sup>2</sup> Jesus was the servant through whom God accomplished worldwide salvation. Christ subordinated himself to earthly existence and the cross's humiliation for others' salvation (Phil 2:4-11). Following the example of Jesus, Christians are also God's servants (John 13:12-17). First Peter 2:11 begins a new section of the letter on the mission of Christian believers living between Jesus's first and second advents. Peter identifies a servant role for Christians (1 Pet 2:16). Like Jesus, Christians subordinate themselves for others' salvation (1 Pet 2:21).

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<sup>1</sup> See Matthew S. Harmon, *The Servant of the Lord and His Servant People: Tracing a Biblical Theme through the Canon*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 54 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Harmon, *The Servant of the Lord and His Servant People*, 143-79.

The role of a servant is appropriate for Christ-followers because it fulfills their biblical-theological identity as God’s servants, following the example of Israel and Jesus (1 Pet 1:3-2:10). A servant role also fulfills a missional strategy that reflects the social situation of Christian believers waiting for Jesus’s second advent.<sup>3</sup> Christians of the NT and today often live at the margins of society and may wonder how God might advance his mission from their position. However, where it may seem like Christians have no opportunity to witness, suffering, and service remain the means God uses to accomplish his redemptive work. Thus, 1 Peter 2:11-3:12 and the sermon below challenge Christians to embrace their subordinate position for God’s mission.

#### **Sermon 4**

With a few exceptions, no one lives alone. Almost everyone lives in relationships with other people. For instance, neighbors often live next door when a family moves into a new home. Their new neighbors may even be Christians.

That Christians may live next door was Jesus’s conviction. Jesus prayed to the Father, “I am not asking that you take them out of this world” (John 17:15). Jesus assumed Christ-followers would remain in their marriages, workplaces, and communities after his death and resurrection. Peter shared Jesus’s assumption that they remain. Christians’ lives change when they follow Christ; nonetheless, they remain citizens, employees, and family members (2:12).

Remaining in the world is not easy. Both Jesus and Peter recognized hardships. Jesus petitioned the Father to protect Christian believers “from the evil one” (John 17:15). In 2:12, Peter highlights the slander that comes with following Christ. However, rather than giving an exit “plan” for Christians remaining in the world, Peter provides an

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<sup>3</sup> Joel B. Green, *1 Peter*, The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 72.

engagement plan.<sup>4</sup> Instead of exiting communities, jobs, and marriages, Peter calls Christians to engage their neighbors for God’s mission because of their identity and calling. In 2:11-12, Peter describes an engagement plan for Christ-followers to further God’s redemptive purposes. Then, in verses 2:13-3:12, Peter applies the plan to challenging contexts and relationships, reflecting Jesus’s example and many Christians’ subordinate positions in the world.

### **An Engagement Plan for Christians (2:11-12)**

Peter’s plan for Christians remaining in the world contains positive and negative elements.<sup>5</sup> Negatively, they “abstain from the passions of the flesh” (2:11). Positively, they pursue “good deeds” intending to save others (2:12 NIV).

**Say “no” to bodily desires (2:11).** While Christians do not leave the world, they first say “no.” Martin Lloyd-Jones clarifies Christians’ relationship to the world: “The gospel of Jesus Christ does not so much take the Christian out of the world as take the world out of the Christian.”<sup>6</sup> Even as Christ-followers remain in the world, they say “no” to many things the world embraces. Peter commands Christians to “abstain from the passions of the flesh” because they “wage war against your soul” (2:11).

The fleshly passions Christian believers abstain from are the body’s physical and emotional desires—what Peter calls the “flesh” (2:11; cf. 3:18, 4:1, 6). The body’s desires may include, for example, the desire for food, pleasure, safety, happiness, and social acceptance. These desires flow out of human creatureliness: the material bodies

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<sup>4</sup> Michaels calls 1 Peter’s instructions a “battle plan.” J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 49 (Waco, TX: Word, 1988), 120.

<sup>5</sup> Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 167.

<sup>6</sup> Bethan Lloyd-Jones, *The Assurance of Our Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 361.

and minds God endowed when he created humanity. As a result, human desires are God-given and natural, but at times sinful.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, the body represents part of human existence. Humans are also spiritual beings. In Genesis, God formed man from the dust of the ground but also “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Gen 2:7). Thus, God gave humanity value, meaning, and significance beyond what they can feel, taste, and see. Genesis summarized the material and immaterial parts of humanity, calling God’s creation a “living soul” (Gen 2:7 KJV; cf. 1 Pet 1:9; 2:11). “Soul” is a summary of humanity’s physical and spiritual existence.<sup>8</sup> “Soul” must refer to the entirety of human existence, not only its spiritual dimension.

Consequently, human experience and what it means to live before God as a “soul” is an indistinct unity of body and spirit. Because of its indistinct unity, the body’s desires can threaten its spirit and “war” against the entire person (2:11). For Peter, unchecked bodily desires can prevent people from fulfilling God’s eternal purposes as they live their lives before him (cf. Luke 12:19-20). Therefore, Christians sometimes abstain from bodily desires.

Peter’s command to abstain from the body’s desires reflects statements found throughout the New Testament (Rom 13:14; Gal 5:16). The NT includes commands to abstain from things against God’s revealed will. For instance, the Scriptures associate the

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<sup>7</sup> Commentators are divided on how “flesh” in 1 Pet compares to Pauline usage. See J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, Black’s New Testament Commentaries (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 104. Michaels, *1 Peter*, 116. My exposition follows those who, like Michaels suggests, “With the adjective σαρκικοί Peter characterizes these impulses as merely physical in motivation and intent, centered on self-preservation and material well-being (cf. σαρκί or ἐν σαρκί with reference to the realm of the physical life in 3:18; 4:1, 2, 6). Such ‘natural impulses,’ although not intrinsically evil for Peter, must yield to other, more vital considerations, centered on what he calls ‘the soul.’”

<sup>8</sup> Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1990) 60. Davids comments on “soul” in 1 Pet 1:9 apply also to 2:11. He argues, “In this he is using ‘soul’ (Gk. *Psychē*) not as a contrast to the body nor, as Paul often does, in a negative way for the natural fallen human self as opposed to a spiritual person (e.g., 1 Cor 15:45), but, as is typical of Hebrew (and thus of the Septuagint, Peter’s Greek Bible), for the total person, the self (Gen 2:7; Matt 16:25; Rom 13:1; Heb 10:39).” See also Michaels, *1 Peter*, 116-17.

“flesh” with sexual sin and other desires and behaviors contrary to God’s will (Gal 5:19-21). However, Scripture also describes abstaining and saying “no” to desires that are not sinful and even good (Matt 6:16; 1 Cor 7:5). By sometimes abstaining from allowable desires such as food and sex, Christians learn to detach themselves from dependency on bodily desires and cultivate a greater dependence of God. The body’s desires come second in a world where God’s purposes are ultimate.

Peter’s logic to abstain from the body’s desires ultimately reflects Christians’ transcendent identity as “sojourners and exiles” and “beloved” (2:11). The terms describe a transcendent identity, first applied to Israel but now to all Christ-followers because of their election and new birth (1:1). Thus, Christians say “no” to bodily desires not only to avoid sin. They abstain from them as God’s “beloved” children, reflecting God’s plans for the world and the people God created Christians to be.

Peter’s logic also reflects transcendent purposes: a concern for something greater than physical reality.<sup>9</sup> Because of their transcendent identity, Christians will say “no” to things that unbelieving neighbors and friends embrace, even “good” things, for God’s greater plan. Rather than holding a transcendent understanding of the body, the opponents of Peter’s first-century audience embraced an imminent one. For first-century non-Christians, fulfilling the body’s desires included no “ultimate good” beyond experience.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, there were few prohibitions on the body’s desires, regardless

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<sup>9</sup> Steven D. Smith, *Pagans and Christians in the City: Culture Wars from the Tiber to the Potomac* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 111-12. Smith summarizes,

So if we understand religion as a relation to the sacred. . . then pagan religion differs from Judaism and Christianity in its placement of the sacred. Pagan religion locates the sacred within this world. In that way, paganism can consecrate the world from within: it is religiosity relative to an immanent sacred. Judaism and Christianity, by contrast reflect a transcendent religiosity; they place the sacred, ultimately outside the world—‘beyond time and space.’

<sup>10</sup> Smith, *Pagans and Christians in the City*, 118. Smith highlights the different approaches to “goods” like happiness and power. He argues,

Christianity recommended a complex but fundamentally different attitude toward these goods. It did not deny their goodness. The world, once again, is a creation of the true God, and hence good; its pleasures and beauty are genuine goods. But they are not the ultimate good. That more ultimate good

of whether they were sinful. Finally, a clear divide existed between Christian believers and their opponents regarding the body and the body's desires. Fulfilling bodily desires, especially sexual, was a significant divide between Christians and non-Christians in the first century.<sup>11</sup> Where Christianity urged abstinence or temperance, society saw no such need when it did not conflict with society's goals.

The body's desires were a significant source of tension and the reason for much of the persecution Christians experienced.<sup>12</sup> For new believers who had embraced Jesus, Peter's command to say "no" meant saying "no" to behaviors they had previously said "yes" to before committing to Christ. Moreover, saying "no" would have meant experiencing hardship from many of their friends and neighbors, who would have found their choices confusing and even offensive.<sup>13</sup> Yet even as Christians abstain from the passions of the flesh for spiritual reasons, saying "no" also had a missional purpose.

**Say "yes" to good deeds (2:12).** Peter calls Christian believers to deny the body's desires for transcendent purposes. Instead, they are to say "yes" to lives characterized by "good deeds" within their communities, homes, and relationships for

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is something often described as 'eternal life.' To this the worldly goods needed to be subordinated; otherwise they would lose their goodness.

<sup>11</sup> Smith, *Pagans and Christians in the City*, 124. Smith suggests, "Sexual morality came to mark the great divide between Christians and the world."

<sup>12</sup> Smith, *Pagans and Christians in the City*, 130-57.

<sup>13</sup> Steven Richard Bechtler, *Following in His Steps: Suffering, Community, and Christology in 1 Peter*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 162 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 206-7. Most commentators identify the suffering in 1 Pet as originating from interpersonal relationships, not state authorities. Bechtler argues,

The suffering appears to have been the result of their withdrawal from certain aspects of public life that they considered to be incommensurate with their faith. Given the interweaving of Roman civic life and religious life on the one hand and the monotheistic, exclusivist, and conversionist nature of Christianity on the other, it is understandable that converts to Christianity would have withdrawn from some aspects of Greco-Roman social life and that such withdrawal would have provoked the ire of their non-Christian neighbors.

See also Peter H. Davids, *A Theology of James, Peter, and Jude*, Biblical Theology of the New Testament 6 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 118-21. For a summary and evaluation of the possible sources of suffering in 1 Pet, see Travis B. Williams, "Suffering from a Critical Oversight: The Persecutions of 1 Peter within Modern Scholarship," *Currents in Biblical Research* 10, no. 2 (2012): 275-92.



God's mission (2:12 NIV). Like saying "no" to the flesh, saying "yes" to lives characterized by good deeds also reflects Christians' transcendent identity as "sojourners and exiles" (2:11). Israel, a nation of "sojourners and exiles," said "no" because they were God's chosen people (cf. Exod 20:1-17). Israel also said "yes" to holy living so that their conduct might draw others to God (Exod 19:6; Isa 42:6). Like Israel, Peter envisions Christians drawing others to Jesus through their lives' exemplary testimony. Therefore, Peter's goal for good deeds is evangelistic, echoing Christ's teaching: "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt 5:14). Peter envisions Christ-followers like Israel as a "light" whose lives, not just words, lead others to glorify God.

Saying "yes" to good deeds also reflects Jesus's second advent. Peter's stated goal for good deeds is that all people would glorify God on the day of Christ's future "visitation" (2:12; cf. 1:5). Present challenges may tempt Christians to adopt short-term strategies such as ungodly behavior or violence against those who slander them. As a result, Christian believers may experience short-term relief from persecution, but these strategies do not consider Jesus's return. Good deeds may not change minds, win arguments, or even stop persecution. However, good deeds can win people to Christ, so opponents experience salvation rather than judgment.

Finally, saying "yes" to good deeds is how Christians can maintain their witness in a hostile environment.<sup>14</sup> By emphasizing good deeds, Peter is not discouraging sharing the gospel as a Christian engagement plan. On the contrary, Peter anticipates that an opportunity to share the gospel will result from obedience to God's commands (2:15).

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<sup>14</sup> Boyley observes, "In Peter, then, good behavior is given an evangelistic potency rare in the New Testament. We need not understand this witness as wordless (except for 3:1), for such hope-filled living leads to questions and opportunities to speak (3:15; cf. 2:9). However, in a situation of likely persecution it is *behavior* that is emphasized." Boyley, "1 Peter: A Mission Document?," 85. Emphasis original.

Besides, Peter identifies gospel proclamation as the cause of the new birth (1:25).<sup>15</sup> For Peter, ministry in both word and deed are not exclusive but complimentary. Nevertheless, Peter's emphasis on deeds over words reflects his audience's hardships.<sup>16</sup> Where Christians living between Jesus's first and second advents may think difficult circumstances prevent them from carrying out God's redemptive plan, Peter reminds them that they can still reach others.

**Conclusion.** Peter's engagement plan for Christians calls them to remain present in the world and engage their opponents for God's mission. Because of their new identity, Peter calls them to sometimes say "no" to the body's desires. God's transcendent purposes have priority over bodily desires, and Christians must forsake them at the cost of social acceptance. At the same time, even as Christ-followers experience hardship because of their choices, they must keep a visible presence in the world and say "yes" to lives characterized by good deeds, even when it results in persecution. While a verbal witness is not discouraged, Christian believers should not neglect to maintain good deeds in everything they do. They should realize that doing good and being good neighbors can bring people to Jesus and thus further God's redemptive plan.

### **Applying Peter's Plan (2:13-3:12)**

Peter's engagement plan is for Christians facing difficulty in the contexts in which they live. Peter prioritizes conduct over words, reflecting Jesus' teaching that good deeds can turn those hostile toward Christianity into those who glorify God. However,

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<sup>15</sup> Paul Akin, "The Missional Motivation of 1 Peter," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 23, no. 3 (2019): 13-15.

<sup>16</sup> Elliot observes the social context of Peter's instruction to Christians. He says, "This is the only practical strategy appropriate for such a sectarian movement that is intent on gaining new members through conversion while simultaneously preserving its distinctiveness. John H. Elliott, *1 Peter*, The Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 37B (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 473.

Peter does not provide a missional plan without application. Peter applies his plan to contexts familiar to Christians living between Jesus’s first and second advents.

To apply his plan, Peter turns to a common feature of first-century instruction, the “Household Code” (cf. Col 3:18-4:1; Eph 5:22-6:9). “Household Codes” were features of both Christian and non-Christian literature. They instructed members of first-century homes regarding their relationships within the home (e.g., husbands and wives, parents and children, servants and masters). Some household codes also included instructions on an individual’s responsibilities to the state.<sup>17</sup> By including instructions to servants and wives, Peter presents his engagement plan as a household code that reflects traditional elements. But Peter adapts the tradition to reflect the hardships Christians experience between Jesus’s first and second advents.<sup>18</sup> For instance, Peter prioritizes subordinate roles (e.g., citizens, wives, and servants). Simultaneously, Peter excludes the authoritative role of master but does include husbands. Yet even as Peter addresses husbands, he focuses on the wife and winning her husband from her subordinate position.

Therefore, Peter imagines all Christ-followers serving God from subordinate positions like wives and servants, situations where non-Christians have significant power and influence over Christians and who may retaliate against them.<sup>19</sup> Christian believers should not bemoan these subordinate roles in society. Instead, Peter challenges them to accept their place and say “yes” for God’s purposes, reflecting Christ’s example.

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<sup>17</sup> Green, *1 Peter*, 70.

<sup>18</sup> Goppelt insists, “In comparison to Colossians and Ephesians, *1 Peter* has altered the household code tradition in order to clarify kerygmatically the social situation of Christians, which for this letter is acute.” Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter*, ed. Ferdinand Hahn, trans. John E. Alsup (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); Green, *1 Peter*, 70; Feldmeier suggests, “‘Throughout, the emphasis is on mission, not on submission.’ Thereby, it is precisely the socially weakest who step into the middle here; those who are exposed to the greatest challenges stand closest to Christ or to the holy women and so become a paradigm for all Christians.” Reinhard Feldmeier, *The First Letter of Peter: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, trans. Peter H. Davids (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), 156. Emphasis original.

<sup>19</sup> Green, *1 Peter*, 72. Green argues, “By emphasizing slaves and wives, and correlating their recommended behavior with that of Christ, Peter paints his audience generally as persons without power and privilege in society-at-large—the very thing we would expect of a people otherwise characterized as ‘aliens and strangers.’”

**Say “yes” in society (2:13-17; 3:8-12).** Christians must accept a subordinate place in their communities for God’s redemptive work. Both 2:13-17 and 3:8-12 address all Christ-followers in their relationships outside the home. Together, they describe the redemptive benefits of pursuing “good” over “evil” (2:14; 3:9).

First Peter 2:13-17 calls Christians to accept their place in society and subject themselves to the rule and authority of the institutions found there. The reason Peter gives is not that these institutions always merit or deserve obedience. On the contrary, after NT times, human institutions had a history of persecuting Christ-followers.<sup>20</sup> Regardless, Christians accept their subordinate position for the “Lord’s sake” and his “will” (cf. Rom 13:1-7).

Since institutions are responsible for punishing those who do evil and praising those who do good, Christians have an opportunity to achieve the redemptive purpose of silencing “the ignorance of foolish people” through good deeds (2:15). While some Christian behavior may bring about unjust punishment from human authorities, Christian values and the values of human institutions overlap. By doing good, Christian believers create a redemptive opportunity for public “praise.” Public praise is redemptive because it counterbalances the public slander of Christians (2:16). Public praise might even lead to greater freedom and acceptance of Christ-followers in society, furthering God’s mission there.

Like 1 Peter 2:13-17, 3:8-12 calls Christians to accept a subordinate place in all their relationships. Here, the subordination Peter has in mind is general deference to others, even when deference is costly. Christian believers are to exercise “sympathy, love, tenderness, and humility,” virtues that involve a level of self-abasement (3:8). Also, they are to tolerate “evil” and “reviling” (2:9). Peter calls Christians to “bless” their opponents (cf. Matt 5:44). Peter’s command to “bless” from the standpoint of redemptive history

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<sup>20</sup> See n13.

assumes more than bestowing worldly good, but salvation. By taking the subordinate position in their relationships, Christ-followers fulfill God's redemptive purpose of "blessing" all nations (Gen 12:1-3)

Unlike other material in 2:11-3:12, where redeeming non-Christians is the goal, the redemptive purpose of 3:9 is self-motivating: that Christians doing good might also "receive a blessing." Peter supports his statement using Psalm 34's promise that God's favor is on those who do "good" rather than "evil" (3:10-12; cf. Ps 34:12-16). Because subordination blesses Christians and non-Christians, service is the best course of action.

**Say "yes" in the home (2:18-20; 3:1-7).** In addition to accepting a subordinate place in society, Christians also must accept a subordinate place in the home for redemptive purposes. First Peter 2:18-20 and 3:1-7 refer to specific relationships within the home, as servants were also part of the household in the first century. Wives and servants also had a subordinate role in the household, with each subordinate to the husband, the master. Finally, Peter has in mind a household where the husband is not Christian, creating difficulty for a Christian wife and servant to live and serve.<sup>21</sup>

First Peter 2:18-20 calls household servants to accept their subordinate place in the home for redemptive purposes. Peter's commands servants to submit themselves and endure the master's harsh treatment even when the treatment is unjust (2:18). Conditions like this would have seemed unbearable and, on the surface, would seem like they had little redemptive value. However, Peter says God rewards household servants when they suffer unjustly and submit to an unjust master (2:20).<sup>22</sup> More importantly, submission

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<sup>21</sup> For an explanation of the circumstances Christian servants and wives faced living in a household where the master and husband was not a Christian, see Davids, *A Theology of James, Peter, and Jude*, 139, 141.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2003), 138-140.

follows Christ's example. More is said below, but Peter identifies a servant's suffering with Christ's suffering and subordination. Jesus, as the "servant par excellence," exemplifies the redemption subordination can accomplish.

Like Peter's instructions to household slaves, 1 Peter 3:1-7 calls Christian wives to accept their subordinate place in the home, even when their husbands are unbelievers. The purpose is the husband's redemption: "So that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives" (3:1). Peter argues that good deeds can positively impact others when a verbal witness is impossible or unwelcome. Good deeds are powerful in any relationship, especially in marriage, where spouses easily observe behavior.

In verse five, Peter motivates wives to accept their subordinate position in the home for God's redemptive plan. He states that submission to a disobedient husband characterized the couple and family through whom God blessed all nations—Abraham and Sarah (Gen 12:1-3; Gen 20:5, 13).<sup>23</sup> Christian wives show themselves to be Sarah's offspring when, like Sarah, they subordinate themselves to unbelieving husbands to accomplish God's redemptive work.

**Follow Jesus's example, who said "yes" (2:21-25).** Because Christ's example stands at the center of the application of Peter's engagement plan, it serves as an example for all Christians, not just wives and servants (2:23; cf. 3:9).<sup>24</sup> For Peter, Jesus is the "servant par excellence" who assumed a subordinate role and experienced unjust suffering to accomplish salvation. Thus, Peter calls all Christ-followers, regardless of their positions, to adopt Jesus's posture and endure unjust suffering for redemption. Peter

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<sup>23</sup> For an explanation of how Sarah and Abraham function as an example of a believing wife and an unbelieving husband, see Jobes, *1 Peter*, 205-6.

<sup>24</sup> Green, *1 Peter*, 72. Green argues that Peter's household code is an example of "inverted parallelism" with 1 Pet 2:13-17 and 3:8-12 addressed to everyone, 1 Pet 2:18-20 and 3:1-7 addressed to slaves and wives (and husbands), and all of 1 Pet 2:13-3:12 pivoting on Jesus's example (1 Pet 2:21-25).

says that Christians “follow” in his steps (2:21). Following Jesus’s steps means first following his example of good conduct in the face of suffering and repaying evil with good (2:23; cf. 3:9). If anyone could have asserted his rights, it was Jesus. Nevertheless, Jesus’s conduct remained above reproach. Instead of taking matters into his own hands, Jesus left matters in God’s hands and submitted himself to God’s plan (cf. Rom 12:19).

Christ’s suffering served as an example, but it also served a “purpose.”<sup>25</sup> Jesus accepted his subordinate role for the ultimate purpose of saving people from sin. Nevertheless, redeeming sinners is not an abstract truth. Jesus’s suffering was for “you” (2:21). With these words, Peter reminds Christian believers that, like their unbelieving family or community, they also needed redemption. Without Jesus’s suffering, Christians’ would have remained unforgiven and separated from God.

Peter describes Jesus’s act of subordination and suffering for sins’ forgiveness using the language and imagery of Isaiah 53.<sup>26</sup> Isaiah 53 describes the subordination of a “suffering servant” for the benefit of others. Redemption through a suffering servant was always God’s plan. Therefore, God fulfilled his plans for the world’s salvation through Christ’s suffering. Further, God’s plan continues through Jesus’s followers’ suffering as they bring the message of Christ to others. By embracing suffering and subordinating themselves to others, Christians accomplish God’s plans for the world’s redemption.

**Conclusion.** Christ-followers who occupy subordinate roles in society or suffer unjustly may think their station hampers or makes their ability to conduct their God-given mission of being a witness impossible. Conversely, this perception could not be further from the truth. Even when speaking a word may lead to significant risk, God

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<sup>25</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 94.

<sup>26</sup> Steve Moyise and Maarten J. J. Menken, *Isaiah in the New Testament*, The New Testament and the Scriptures of Israel (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 183. Moyise and Menken citing Schutter observe that “1 Pet 2:22-25 contains the most ‘elaborate reorganization or rewriting of Is. 53’ in the New Testament.”

can advance his mission in the world through Christian believers “without a word” (3:1). Because the nature of redemption is servant-oriented, Christians’ subordinate roles in society position them to win others to Christ. First, however, they must be willing to accept their assignment. By remembering Jesus’s self-abasement on their behalf, Peter motivates Christians to do the same for others.

### **Application**

Valley Baptist Church can benefit from Peter’s challenge to remain distinct from the world and engage the world for its redemption. Throughout church history, there have been times when Christ-followers, rather than remain, fled or disengaged. Some left society behind to escape the world’s wickedness, living in deserts and caves or traveling on ships to new lands. Others established separate communities to escape the hostility of society. Unfortunately, as society has turned away from God’s ways and made it more challenging to maintain the Christian faith in the West, Christians today are again looking for the exits. But escaping the world is not the assumption of the NT. Instead, Peter calls all Christ-followers to remain in the world and accept a servant’s subordinate position to draw non-Christians to Jesus through lives characterized by good deeds.

In response to Peter’s challenge, some might retort that desperate times call for desperate measures. Today, being a good neighbor does not win the arguments Christian believers need to win to advance God’s plan in the world. In contrast, Peter’s words are a helpful reminder. Days, weeks, or years from now, opponents will not remember the arguments Christians make, but they will remember how Christ-followers lived and treated opponents. Victory for Peter is not winning arguments but winning people. Christians today need to remember that lives characterized by good deeds can bring opponents to Christ.

Christians today must also accept Peter’s challenge to remain distinct from the world. Many Christians today continue to live and love as non-Christians live and love.



Christian believers must learn to sometimes say “no” to the body’s desires no matter how their neighbors and friends respond. Sometimes, unbelieving friends and neighbors fault Christ-followers for saying “no” all the time. Christians do say no, curbing their sexuality and forsaking status and prestige. However, they say “no” for a greater purpose—to say “yes” to God and his redemptive work (Mark 8:35).

### **Conclusion**

As God’s servants, God can use Christians to accomplish redemption. Being a good neighbor and accepting a subordinate role is hard, especially when submission is costly. People naturally prioritize their comfort and security. Nevertheless, if Christians follow Christ’s example through service, they can advance God’s redemptive purposes while they wait for Jesus’s return.

## CHAPTER 6

### SERMON 5: ENCOURAGEMENT FOR PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS (1 PETER 3:13-4:6)

#### **Introduction**

Persecution troubles many Christians; why would a sovereign and good God allow persecution in the world he made?<sup>1</sup> Although God permitted persecution, he incorporated persecution into his plan to redeem the world. In Genesis 3:15, God planned redemption to result from the struggle between the woman's and the serpent's offspring. God fulfilled his redemptive plan in the persecution experienced by God's people throughout redemptive history (Gen 4:8; Exod 1:9-10; Job 1-2; Heb 11:35-37).<sup>2</sup> Therefore, while relationships and circumstances contribute to the suffering God's people experience, the basis is theological, resulting from God's sovereign plan and Satan's attacks (1 Pet 5:6, 8). A biblical-theological understanding of persecution reveals the cause of Christian persecution.

A biblical-theological understanding of persecution also reveals God's plan's shape. First, since God will redeem the world from sin, death, and Satan through persecution, a redemptive act of suffering will bring the plan to completion—ending sin's and death's reign and the struggle between the woman's and the serpent's offspring (Gal 1:3). Second, biblical-theological themes, including persecution, escalate as the biblical

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<sup>1</sup> F. P. Cotterell, "Suffering," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 802.

<sup>2</sup> See James M. Hamilton Jr., "The Soul Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10, no. 2 (2006); Cheek, "The Individual and Collective Offspring of the Woman: The Canonical Outworking of Genesis 3:15," *Themelios* 48, no. 1 (2023): 29-46.

story unfolds (Dan 12:1-3; Matt 24:21).<sup>3</sup> Finally, biblical-theological themes first climax in Jesus before being extended to God's people (John 15:20).<sup>4</sup> From these observations, the Bible anticipated persecution to escalate for the righteous, extended first to Jesus and then to his followers, to culminate in the world's redemption (Dan 7:21-27; Zech 13:7-9; Col 1:24).<sup>5</sup>

God fulfilled his redemptive plan through Christ's suffering. Jesus overcame sin, death, and Satan by suffering redemptively on the cross (1 Pet 2:22-25; cf. Isa 53). Furthermore, while persecution climaxed in Jesus's death, persecution extends to Christians' experience who live between Jesus's first and second advents (2 Thess 2:3-4; Rev 1:9). First Peter 3:13-4:3 continues the letter's second section with a focus on Christian persecution. Peter explains a theological understanding of Christian persecution and describes how Christ-followers should respond and stick together to carry out God's redemptive work. In Peter's letter and the sermon below, persecution is not a reason for fear but a basis for encouragement and assurance. Because Christians suffer, they can be sure God's redemptive plans are coming true.

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<sup>3</sup> The OT and NT describe a time of unprecedented distress and persecution for God's people just before the end of redemptive history. See G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 187-224. Selwyn identifies persecution as the "calamity par excellence that belonged to the eschatological pattern." Edward G. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter with Introduction, Notes, and Essays* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd, 1946), 301; The OT expectation of persecution was also "nurtured" during the intertestamental period in Jewish writings. They are sometimes called the "Messianic Woes." James M. Hamilton Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 671. Scholars debate Jewish intertestamental writings' influence on persecution in the NT and 1 Pet. See Mark Dubis, *Messianic Woes in First Peter: Suffering and Eschatology in 1 Peter 4:12-19*, *Studies in Biblical Literature* 33 (New York: P. Lang, 2002); Brant James Pitre, *Jesus, the Tribulation, and the End of Exile: Restoration Eschatology and the Origin of the Atonement* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 135.

<sup>5</sup> Dale C. Allison, *The End of the Ages Has Come: An Early Interpretation of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 128-36; Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 394-401.

## Sermon 5

Christians can take comfort in knowing God protects them. One story illustrates God's protection and tells of a boy who planned to attend a birthday party at a friend's house.<sup>6</sup> When the anticipated day arrived, a snowstorm made driving to the party impossible, so he had to walk. After reaching the house, the boy looked back and saw a person retreating from view into the falling snow. The person was his father. The boy's father had followed his son to ensure he arrived safely. Like a protective father, God watches over Christians. God is concerned for their safety and security.

Recently, Peter's letter urged Christian believers to live lives characterized by good deeds (2:11-3:12). Peter urged good deeds to Christians to win others to Christ and secure Christians' safety (3:1, 10-12). Generally, neighbors and friends will accept and not persecute Christ-followers when they do good rather than evil. Most importantly, good deeds secure God's protection and aid: "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are open to their prayer" (3:10-12; cf. Ps 34:12-16). When Peter asks in verse 13, "Who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?" the implied answer is "no one" because of God's protection. Therefore, good deeds are an effective plan for Christians living in the world between Jesus's first and second advents. Christian believers can avoid harsh treatment, secure God's protection, and fulfill their redemptive purpose by being good neighbors.

However, while being a good neighbor should result in God's protection and no trouble from neighbors, many Christian believers still experience persecution despite their righteous behavior. Accordingly, 1 Peter 3:13-4:6 seeks to encourage Christians who experience persecution in the hope that they might continue to live good lives. Peter provides three encouragements for Christians to continue suffering unjustly: God's favor

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<sup>6</sup> Dennis DeHann, *Windows on the Word: Illustrations from Our Daily Bread*. (Grand Rapids: Radio Bible Class, 1984), 56.

and rewards remain; Jesus overcame sin, death, and evil on Christians' behalf; and God's verdict is superior to opponents' judgment.

### **Persecuted Christians Still Enjoy God's Favor and Rewards (3:13-17)**

Peter encourages persecuted Christians that they have not lost God's favor and rewards because of their suffering: "But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed" (3:14 CSB). Peter's statement is reassuring for three reasons: first, harm is expected for Christ-followers because of the period of redemptive history in which they live; second, suffering is not a sign of God's displeasure or a loss of rewards; and finally, Christians can persist in carrying out their redemptive work without fear.

**Persecution's certainty.** Peter acknowledges that Christians may experience persecution since they live between Jesus's first and second advents. In acknowledging the certainty of harm, Peter is not contradicting his prior statements: that good deeds secure God's protection or that society will treat Christian believers kindly because of their excellent behavior. The statements remain factual between Jesus's first and second advents. Nevertheless, by acknowledging the certainty of persecution, Peter addresses a specific characteristic of the time between Jesus's first and second advents—righteous suffering (3:14). Righteous suffering is consistent, though a minor theme, throughout all redemptive history (cf. 1 John 3:12). However, as redemptive history progressed, Scripture predicted that persecution would escalate in intensity, becoming a major theme as salvation history reached its climax: the Messiah's advent and the world's redemption (Dan 7:21; 12:1-3; Isa 53).

Since Jesus is the Messiah, escalated and intense persecution characterizes the period between Jesus's first and second advents. For example, Jesus suffers and dies on the cross. In addition, Jesus and the NT writers taught Christians to expect similar persecution, and many were persecuted, including the Christians Peter addressed in the

first century (1:5; cf. John 15:20). Thankfully, living between Jesus's first and second advents does not mean that every Christian will experience tribulation or that the suffering is constant: "But even *if* you should suffer" (3:14; cf. 1:6; 3:17).<sup>7</sup> Good deeds should result in God's protection and kindness from neighbors. Nonetheless, persecution remains certain for most Christians because they live at redemptive history's climax.

**Persecution's meaning.** The harm Christians experience between Jesus's first and second advents does not indicate God's displeasure or a loss of rewards. On the contrary, Peter positively "reframes" tribulation, reflecting Christians' place in redemptive history.<sup>8</sup> Rather than cursed, persecuted Christians are now "blessed" (3:14). The reversal of values is contrary to how people understand suffering, where harm might suggest the disfavor of God. Instead, the reversal of values reflects the expected persecution between Jesus's first and second advents.

Because persecution is part of God's redemptive plan, suffering becomes a prized virtue with other prized virtues. Peter's statement on righteous sufferers' blessed state is a restatement of one of Jesus's beatitudes: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt 5:10). In his beatitudes, Jesus pronounced God's favor and rewards on the "poor in spirit," the

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<sup>7</sup> Grammatically, NT Greek communicates the "actuality or potentiality" of an action taking place by the form of the word used. As a result, Peter can communicate the actuality or potentiality of whether Christians will experience suffering. The form Peter uses in 3:14 is the optative mood in Greek grammar. Though rare, the optative "is used when a speaker wishes to portray an action as a possible condition in the future, usually a remote possibility." Daniel B Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 484. From grammar alone, one might conclude that suffering remains a remote possibility in 1 Pet: "if you should suffer" (3:14). However, one must also consider the context of the letter, the NT, and the flow of redemptive history. Schreiner concludes after applying a wider interpretive lens, "The optative is used because suffering, though not a constant experience in the Christian life, is always a threat and could erupt at any time. Peter is not teaching that suffering is rare, only that it is not perpetual." Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2003), 171.

<sup>8</sup> Peter H. Davids, *A Theology of James, Peter, and Jude*, Biblical Theology of the New Testament 6 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 146.

“meek,” the “merciful,” the “pure in heart,” *and* righteous sufferers.<sup>9</sup> Also, while the favor and rewards Jesus pronounced on suffering Christians were a present reality, in his other beatitudes, the rewards remained future. Christ’s promise of rewards is not a contradiction but a reflection of Jesus’s identity. As God’s Spirit-anointed servant, Jesus is the one who actualizes God’s promises in his first advent and will bring God’s promises to fulfillment at his second (cf. Luke 4:21; cf. Isa 61).<sup>10</sup>

Echoing Jesus, Peter also announces God’s favor and rewards on persecuted Christians who “are blessed” and will “obtain a blessing” (3:14 NIV; 3:9). Christian followers enjoy God’s favor now as they suffer because of Christ’s redemptive work. Further, because righteous suffering is a prized virtue, Christian believers can expect a full reward at Jesus’s return. Therefore, Peter’s and Jesus’s words assure persecuted Christians that God’s favor and rewards remain.

**Persecution’s Response.** Because harm is a sign of God’s favor, Christians should not fear persecution but persist in their redemptive work. Verses 3:14b and 15 command Christians to forgo fear and renew their devotion to Jesus. They do not need to “fear” those who harm them because of God’s future blessings (3:14; cf. Matt 10:28; Isa 8:12). Out of fear, Christian believers may curb their religious devotion, especially practices that provoke friends and neighbors to harm them. As a result, Christian witness in homes and communities may diminish, bringing God’s redemptive plans to a halt. However, with sinful fear shown to be unjustified and future rewards assured even when Christians suffer, they can positively renew their devotion to Jesus: “honor Christ the

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<sup>9</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, International Critical Commentary, vol. 1 (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 446.

<sup>10</sup> Davies and Allison identify Isa 61 as the basis for Jesus’s beatitudes in Matt 5, noting how Isa 61 identifies God’s Spirit-anointed servant as the one who actualizes God’s promises to the poor and those who mourn (Isa 61:1, 3). Further, Jesus’s words in Luke 4:21, where Jesus says he has fulfilled Isa 61, serve as the basis for understanding that Jesus’s presence actualizes God’s commands even as their fullness awaits his return. Davies and Allison, *A Critical Commentary*, 1:438-39.

Lord as Holy” (3:15). Peter commands Christians to devote themselves to Jesus Christ and put God’s purposes first.

Furthermore, Christians, free of sinful fear, might even speak openly about their faith by “always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for the hope that is in you” (3:15). Convinced of God’s favor, Christ-followers can share the gospel fearlessly with their friends and neighbors. In their witness, Peter urges Christians to respond with gentleness and respect (3:15). Next, Christian believers must maintain a clear conscience in all they do, knowing that God knows their thoughts and actions (3:16).<sup>11</sup> Finally, even when the response to their witness is persecution, Peter assures Christians that God will vindicate them at the end of history and that good behavior is always better than evil behavior in God’s eyes (3:16-17).<sup>12</sup>

**Conclusion.** Peter encourages persecuted Christians that they still enjoy God’s favor and rewards. The rewards remain future rather than present realities because they live between Jesus’s first and second advents, where suffering characterizes their experience. Still, God’s present favor and future rewards should motivate Christians to forgo fear and renew their devotion to Jesus Christ and his mission while waiting for his return.

### **Jesus Overcame Sin, Death, and Evil on Christians’ Behalf (3:18-22)**

Besides threatening the loss of favor and rewards, persecution tempts Christians to sin and threatens their lives.<sup>13</sup> Also, the persecution Christian believers

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<sup>11</sup> Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 176

<sup>12</sup> Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 178

<sup>13</sup> Even if scholars’ consensus is that Peter’s audience’s suffering never reached the levels of statewide persecution and martyrdom as later in Christian history, Peter’s statements never exclude the possibility of martyrdom. For scholars who believe that Peter’s audience could have experienced martyrdom, see R. T. France, “Exegesis in Practice: Two Examples,” in *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*, ed. I. Howard Marshall (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006),



experience is the work of opponents enslaved by evil powers.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, any encouragement offered to Christians must address the threat that sin, death, and evil pose to their well-being. Peter addresses these threats in 3:18-22. Jesus overcame sin, death, and evil through his death, resurrection, and ascension; therefore, Christians will too.

**Jesus overcame sin and death (3:18).** Peter encourages Christ-followers threatened by persecution with the example of Jesus: “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous” (3:18a). Peter encourages Christians that Christ also suffered for the good of others. Further, even though Jesus suffered and died, Jesus rose from the dead, “being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit” (3:18b). Accordingly, Jesus is an example of someone who experienced persecution for others’ benefit and overcame it.

Presenting Jesus Christ as an example contributes significantly to Peter’s overall encouragement for persecuted Christians (cf. 2:21). Yet, Peter reveals that Jesus’s righteous suffering was *uniquely* purposed “to bring them to God” through reconciliation (3:18).<sup>15</sup> Sin separates Christian believers from God and results in death. In the OT, God made provisions to atone for sins through animal sacrifices, where animals suffered on sinners’ behalf (Lev 4:32-35). Like the OT sacrifices, Christ’s suffering was also an act of substitution for the payment of sins, “the righteous for the unrighteous” (3:18). By

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265; and J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, Black’s New Testament Commentaries (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 148.

<sup>14</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 117. Marshall describes how Christians would have perceived persecution as having demonic origins. He notes, “The early Christians also lived in a society that really believed in the existence of spiritual powers, both good and evil. Obviously, the New Testament writers shared this belief. It was entirely natural, therefore, for Peter to perceive the persecution of Christians as motivated not merely by the malice of pagan masters, neighbors, and rulers but by sinister demonic forces behind them.”

<sup>15</sup> William J. Dalton, *Christ’s Proclamation to the Spirits: A Study of 1 Peter 3:18-4:6*, *Analecta Biblica*, 23 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965), 104, 111. Dalton clarifies, “It cannot be maintained that the author expects his readers to imitate Christ along these lines: he does not regard them as co-redeemers with Christ in the same way as he regards the Christian slaves as fellow sufferers with Christ in 2:20.”

contrast, unlike the OT sacrifices, Jesus sacrificed himself for Christ-followers “once.” His death was the climax and fulfillment of the OT sacrifices (Heb 10:12). With Jesus’s death, payment for sins is complete, and there is no longer any barrier between Christians and God (Heb 7:27).

A second unique purpose of Jesus’s suffering was to overcome death through resurrection, where Jesus was “made alive in the Spirit” (3:18).<sup>16</sup> Death is the just penalty for sin and represents God’s perfect justice (Rom 6:23). However, the death Jesus experienced was undeserved because of his sinless life. As a result, in his perfect justice, God raised Jesus from the dead. Furthermore, as Christ’s death was on behalf of Christians, so Jesus’s resurrection was also on their behalf (Rom 8:11). Therefore, Christian believers also overcome death by resurrection through union with Jesus: “though judged in the in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does” (cf. 4:6).<sup>17</sup> Even if Christians should commit sin or die from persecution, they can have confidence that God will resurrect them into his presence because Jesus overcame sin and death on their behalf.

**Jesus overcame evil (3:19-22).** Just as Jesus Christ overcame sin and death on behalf of Christians, Jesus also overcame the evil powers who enslaved Christian believers and their opponents. Though enslaved, Christians and non-Christians were guilty parties. Humanity, beginning with Adam and Eve, sided with evil powers in the

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<sup>16</sup> Debate exists over what Peter means by Jesus being “put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit” (3:18). Schreiner’s solution seems best, arguing, “The first is a dative of reference, and the second is a dative of agency. Christ was put to death with reference to or in the sphere of his body, but on the other hand he was made alive by the Spirit. Interestingly, the parallel in 1 Tim 3:16 should be interpreted similarly. Jesus ‘appeared in a body’ (en sarki, lit., ‘in the flesh’) and ‘was vindicated by the Spirit’ (en pneumatī).” Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 184.

<sup>17</sup> As there is debate about Peter’s meaning of Jesus’s resurrection in 1 Pet 3:18, there is debate about what Peter means of the dead, “that judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does (1 Pet 4:6). Schreiner’s solution again seems best where 1 Pet 3:18 and 4:6 serve as parallel passages teaching bodily resurrection. Schreiner argues, “The contrast between the ‘flesh’ and ‘spirit’ here is parallel to 1 Pet 3:18, for Christ also died in terms of his flesh, but he was raised to life by the Holy Spirit. A similar destiny awaits believers. They die physically but will be raised to life by the Holy Spirit.” Schreiner, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, 209.

ongoing conflict between God and Satan (Gen 3; 1 John 3:10). Because humanity rebelled against God and sided with evil powers, the result was judgment. When Adam and Eve rebelled against God, they suffered and died. Adam and Eve were responsible for their rebellion's consequences. However, so was the serpent, personifying evil, who tempted them. In Genesis 3:14-19, God cursed the man, the woman, *and* the serpent. By punishing the serpent, God acknowledged Satan's responsibility for human sin.

God's judgment on Adam and Eve was not the last time sin with evil powers resulted in judgment. In verses 18-20, Peter recounts the judgment of Noah's flood, which also resulted from sin with evil powers (Gen 6:1-4).<sup>18</sup> For this second rebellion, the punishment for humanity was death through a worldwide flood, and the punishment for the evil spirits who did not "obey" was "prison" (1 Pet 3:19-20; cf. 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6). For Peter, Noah's story is yet another example of the disastrous consequences of humanity's relationship with evil. Therefore, Christians first must overcome sin, but they also must overcome the evil forces complicit in their rebellion against God. Second, Noah's story is a reminder that God will judge humanity and evil powers a final time. Peter's inclusion of Noah's flood looks backward in salvation history but also looks forward to God's final judgment, which Scripture patterns as a second flood (Matt 24:37; 2 Pet 3:5-7).<sup>19</sup> To add urgency, Peter declares later in his letter that God's final judgment is already underway (4:17). Therefore, like Noah, Christ-followers must find a way to escape!

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<sup>18</sup> The interpretation of "sons of God" in Gen 6:2 as angelic beings who sinned by taking wives is debated. However, as Davids observes, the events of Gen 6:1-4 and its proximity to Noah's flood in the same chapter contain most of the "elements" (i.e., disobedient spirits, Noah's flood) that Peter describes in 3:19-22. Davids, *A Theology of James, Peter, and Jude*, 2014, 140. Absent in Gen 6:1-4 is any reference to God's punishment of spirits or prison. Nevertheless, both 2 Pet 2:4 and Jude 6 include the elements of punishment and prison though they leave out a reason for punishment. Thus, 2 Pet 2:4 and Jude 6 supply the rest of the elements 1 Pet 3:18-22 includes, suggesting that Gen 6:1-4 is the event Peter used as the basis for 1 Pet 3:18-22. Further, all the elements, including preaching to spirits, are found in descriptions of Gen 6:1-4 by later Jewish tradition and the apocryphal book of 1 Enoch. 1 Enoch even describes the patriarch Enoch proclaiming judgment to imprisoned spirits, further confirming that Gen 6:1-4 is the basis for Peter's teaching (1 Enoch 16:3). For parallels between Peter and 1 Enoch, see Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians*, vol. 2 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 186-89.

<sup>19</sup> Dalton, *Christ's Proclamation to the Spirits*, 112-13.

Thankfully, Jesus overcame the evil powers who enslaved Christians. Peter highlights that when Christ ascended into heaven, he “proclaimed” victory to the spirits complicit in the flood’s judgment and who have remained complicit in human sin ever since (3:19).<sup>20</sup> Jesus, through resurrection, gained authority over the evil forces subjecting Christians to bondage. In addition, by ascending to heaven, Jesus’s rule over evil is now in full effect since Jesus has “gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him” (3:22). Jesus Christ will deliver anyone from evil who unites to him by faith.

Peter further encourages Christ-followers who may doubt their deliverance from evil with a third truth from Noah’s deliverance: God rescued Noah from judgment and evil “through water” (3:21). For Peter, Noah’s salvation by water is a pattern of Christian salvation depicted in baptism. In the New Testament, Christian baptism represents renouncing sin, purification, and identifying with Jesus’s death and resurrection (Acts 22:16; Rom 6:3-4). However, like Noah’s deliverance, Christian baptism also symbolizes Christians’ deliverance from evil and judgment.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Dalton, *Christ’s Proclamation to the Spirits*, 169. From the basis of Gen 3:1-4, the content of Jesus’s proclamation, which Peter does not say, must be a proclamation of victory or judgment rather than salvation. Also, Peter specifies no direction to Jesus’s travel in 1 Pet 3:19, down or up, only that he “went.” BDAG, πορεύω, 853, “To move over an area, gener. with a point of departure or destination specified, go, proceed, travel.” Therefore, only context can determine Jesus’s travel direction. Contextually, πορεύω is used again in 1 Pet 3:22, where Peter describes Jesus’s going “into heaven,” suggesting that preaching to spirits took place during his ascension and not when he was in the grave. Acts 1:10 also uses πορεύω to describe Jesus’s ascension.

Furthermore, 1 Pet 3:18-22’s association with views that Jesus descended into Hades, preached to dead souls, or preached salvation to the dead, are the result of using Scripture passages other than Gen 3:1-4 to explain 1 Pet 3:18-22. Michaels identifies the influence of 1 Pet 4:6 and Eph 4:8-10 as examples. J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 49 (Waco, TX: Word, 1988), 196. Using Gen 3:1-4 as the background of 1 Pet 3:18-22 eliminates the need to look to other texts to explain 1 Pet 3:18-22 and also offers an interpretation that Peter’s suffering listeners would have found relevant: Jesus’s victory over evil.

<sup>21</sup> What baptism saves Christians from in 1 Pet 3:21 is debated. Keener agrees that baptism is meant to symbolize salvation from eschatological destruction. Yet he notes that “if the analogy is meant to be more precise . . . the point is instead that they are saved from their enemies who are disobedient (1 Pet 3:19-20). In baptism, believers are also saved from the cosmic powers.” Craig S. Keener, *1 Peter: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021), 278. Achtemeier also understands evil as baptism’s redemptive goal in 1 Pet 3:22. He argues, “It is probably in such deliverance from those powers that one ought to understand the way in which baptism saves by means of Christ’s resurrection. Because such deliverance from an evil world would also correspond to what water accomplished for Noah by delivering him from an

By reminding Christian believers of the “pledge” they made to Christ in baptism, Peter assures Christians that their relationship with evil is fundamentally changed (3:21 NIV).<sup>22</sup> Through union with the resurrected and ascended Christ, Christians no longer need to fear evil or judgment. Evil powers no longer rule over Christians as they did before Jesus delivered them. Evil powers are no longer supreme; Christ is supreme, and evil powers are now under his authority. Finally, even Christians’ opponents are under Jesus’s authority because Jesus gained authority over opponents when he gained authority over evil powers.<sup>23</sup>

**Conclusion.** Where sin, death, and evil threaten the well-being of Christians, Peter encourages Christ-followers that they will overcome them all (Rom 8:31-39). Christians will overcome sin and death because Jesus suffered as a substitute on their behalf and rose from the dead, reconciling them to God. They will also overcome evil and their opponents because by pledging themselves to Jesus in baptism, Jesus was victorious and now rules over evil from his ascended position at God’s right hand.

### **God’s Verdict Is Superior to Opponents’ Judgment (4:1-6)**

As a further consequence of Jesus’s victory over sin, death, and evil, Christians also overcome the opinions of their human opponents: “that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does” (4:6b). Peter’s final

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evil world, it is in this direction that we ought to seek to understand what our author means by the saving power of baptism.” Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter: A Commentary on 1 Peter*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 268. For an example of Peter’s baptismal theology applied to baptism practices, the baptism service from the Book of Common Prayer 1662 asks baptism candidates, “Dost thou renounce the devil and all his works?” Brian Cummings, ed., *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 422.

<sup>22</sup> Keener argues, “If a pledge is in view here, it probably means a pledge to maintain a good conscience, whether as a pledge offered when undertaking baptism (perhaps in response to a question) or the pledge implicitly expressed by baptism itself. Peter may be reminding believers facing suffering that their baptism has irrevocably committed them to Christ as well as united them with Noah’s deliverance and Christ’s triumph.” Keener, *1 Peter: A Commentary*, 283.

<sup>23</sup> John H. Elliott, *1 Peter*, The Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 37B (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 859.

encouragement to Christ-followers is that God's verdict on their lives is superior to the judgment opponents inflict on them. Consequently, Christians should endure opponents' persecution to pursue God's will since God has the final say.

**Choose to endure opponents' judgment (4:1-4).** Christ's victory over sin, death, and evil through suffering demonstrates that suffering is necessary to accomplish God's will (cf. 3:18-22). Consequently, Peter exhorts Christians in 4:1-4 to endure persecution to do God's will. Because Jesus "suffered in the flesh" to accomplish God's will, Christians must decide to suffer also (4:1; cf. 3:18).<sup>24</sup> Thus, persecution is an essential sign that a person is "no longer living for human passions but for the will of God" (4:2).

Since persecution is a necessary consequence of doing God's will between Jesus's first and second advent, following Jesus Christ involves more than saying "yes" to good deeds and "no" to evil. Doing good and avoiding evil was necessary in previous eras in salvation history (cf. 3:10-12; cf. Ps 34:12-16). Nevertheless, Christ-followers, like Jesus, must make an additional commitment to say "yes" to suffering: "arm yourselves with the same way of thinking" (4:1). Because Christians live in a chapter of redemptive history dominated by persecution, they cannot carry out God's redemptive purposes without also saying "yes" to enduring persecution.

After accepting persecution as a necessary consequence of doing God's will, Christian believers should proceed to make God's will their life's singular focus, despite how opponents treat them (4:2). After all, Christians do not have an endless amount of time to further God's redemptive work. When Peter says that Christians should spend the "rest of the time . . . for the will of God" and not "human passions," Peter assumes a

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<sup>24</sup> Martin Williams, *The Doctrine of Salvation in the First Letter of Peter* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 211.

fixed and limited period exists between Jesus's first and second advents (4:2, 7).<sup>25</sup> Every day that passes is one fewer day Christians have to accomplish God's will. Besides, as Peter makes clear, Christ-followers, before they followed Jesus, wasted their time "living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless adultery" (4:3). Because Christians wasted their time on sinful behaviors before conversion, they must not waste a minute more.

Furthermore, Christians will cease participating in activities that characterize unbelieving society because they are committed to God's will. In response to Christians' nonparticipation, Peter says that the response of friends and neighbors will range from "surprise" to "judgment" and even persecution (4:4, 6). Thus, the suffering Christ-followers can expect from obedience to God is social rejection. They can expect friends and neighbors to ostracize and judge them as a hindrance and a threat because of their commitment to Jesus Christ.

**Wait for God's verdict (4:5-6).** As hurtful as it is for friends and neighbors to judge Christians unfairly, what opponents decide is not as important as what God determines. To encourage Christian believers who have experienced persecution for doing good, Peter informs them that God will pronounce a final verdict on their opponents: "but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead" (4:5). Scripture elsewhere uses the phrase "living and the dead" to describe God's judgment at the end of history (Acts 10:42; 2 Tim 4:1; Heb 9:27). At salvation history's end, everyone, Christian and non-Christian, dead and living, will give an account to God.

By referencing the final judgment, Peter encourages Christians to expect a different verdict from God than the verdict they received from opponents. Whereas opponents judge the actions of Christ-followers negatively, in a dramatic reversal, God

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<sup>25</sup> Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, 169.

will judge their actions favorably: “They might live in the spirit the way God does” (4:6). Peter’s description of God’s promise to vindicate Christians “in the spirit” is identical to the resurrection “in the spirit” Jesus received in 3:18. Hence, both verses describe the identical outcome of resurrection.<sup>26</sup> As God raised Jesus from the dead for enduring unjust suffering and doing God’s will, persecuted Christians can also expect God to resurrect them. Also, God’s promise to vindicate Christ-followers, Peters says, is based on Christ’s work—the “gospel” (4:6). As Peter noted earlier in the letter, believing the gospel is the grounds for future vindication and blessing (1:8-9, 25). Finally, because God will judge “the dead” and not just the “living,” Peter assures Christians that God does not limit resurrection to living Christian believers. God’s resurrection promise also extends to the Christian dead (4:5-6).<sup>27</sup>

**Conclusion.** Living God’s way can lead to the judgment of friends and neighbors. Therefore, Christians need to accept persecution as a necessary consequence of doing God’s will and not waste time pursuing the ungodly activities of society. Indeed, even when friends and neighbors judge Christ-followers unfavorably, what opponents decide is not as important as what God determines. Christians who suffer consequences can look forward to a favorable verdict from God at the final judgment because they believe the gospel.

## Application

The world is unsafe for those who do God’s will. More Christians are persecuted today than at any other time in salvation history.<sup>28</sup> However, God’s grace has

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<sup>26</sup> See n16 and n17.

<sup>27</sup> Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 272. In 1 Pet 4:6, the dead, in contrast to 1 Pet 3:19, are people rather than angelic beings.

<sup>28</sup> Christina Maza, “Christian Persecution and Genocide Is Worse Now than ‘Any Time in History,’ Report Says,” *Newsweek*, January 4, 2018, <https://www.newsweek.com/christian-persecution-genocide-worse-ever-770462>.



exempted many Christian believers in the West from suffering like their Christian brothers and sisters worldwide. Nevertheless, as 1 Peter 3:12-4:6 shows, the underlying cause of Christians' persecution is theological, not geography or politics. In God's plans, righteous suffering is a necessary consequence for doing God's will between Jesus's first and second advents. As a result, Christians everywhere, even Valley Baptist Church, may experience persecution as they pursue God's redemptive will.

If persecution is possible and increases for Christ-followers as Jesus's second advent approaches, Peter's encouragement remains relevant for all Christians today. Knowing Christians retain God's favor and rewards regardless of persecution comforts Christian believers who might assume that persecution is a sign of God's displeasure. Today, with few hardships, many Western Christians associate unfavorable circumstances with God's disapproval. Nevertheless, the shift in circumstances for God's people also comes with a shift in values. Contemporary Western culture may not value suffering, but God values suffering. Thus, Christ-followers who shift their perspective on persecution to what God reveals will find persecution encouraging.

Second, hearing that Christ has already overcome sin, death, and evil reassures Christians today when fighting sin, death, and evil seems like a losing battle. As depressing as it is for Christian believers to learn that the battle continues, Jesus's victory assures them of eventual victory and gives them the courage to keep fighting. For Christ-followers who need a reason to endure, Jesus's victory gives them the assurance they need.

Finally, the perspective that God's verdict is superior to opponents' judgment is freeing to Christians today, who may have grown accustomed to the praise of others. Everyone wants people to like them. However, with the emergence of "cancel" culture, society has more tools than ever to ruin and destroy the lives of those who refuse to submit to society's demands. For Christian believers who have been "canceled," knowing

that God promises to vindicate persecuted Christians at the final judgment encourages Christians to endure even the worst treatment.

### **Conclusion**

Peter's encouragements in 3:12-4:6 are a welcomed relief to Christians who experience persecution. If they commit to pursuing God's purposes, they must also commit to suffering. Yet because of Jesus's victory on the cross, persecution is inconsequential to the glorious future God has for Christian believers. Therefore, knowing the truth about persecution encourages Christians and gives them the courage to continue pursuing God's redemptive work until Jesus returns.

## CHAPTER 7

### SERMON 6: SUFFERING IN COMMUNITY (1 PETER 4:7-11; 5:1-5)

#### **Introduction**

The communal aspect of human experience is everywhere in the Bible. Unlike Western culture, where the organizing principle is the individual, in the Old Testament and New Testament, it was the family or “house.”<sup>1</sup> In the OT, “house” described clans and smaller family units that shared a common ancestor or lived domestic life together (Gen 12:17; Exod 16:31). “House” also identified God’s elect family, the “house” of Israel (Exod 19:3). In the NT, the “household” remained the most fundamental organizing unit of society, where social, religious, and economic obligations were nurtured and expressed (Matt 13:57).<sup>2</sup>

First Peter, like the rest of the NT, addressed Christians within society’s social structures, including the family (1 Pet 2:13-3:7; cf. Eph 5:22-6:9; Col 3:18-4:1). Peter’s instructions to Christian wives, and household slaves, reflected the structures of first-century homes and encouraged Christ-followers to continue to serve faithfully in their roles for redemptive purposes. Even though Peter’s description of the home reflected the cultural practices of the NT and OT family, Peter imagined that Christians formed a “household” of their own, with a family-like structure and familial-like obligations to fulfill (1 Pet 4:17).

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<sup>1</sup> D. C. McCartney, “Household, Family,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 511.

<sup>2</sup> McCartney, “Household Family,” 511-12.

In 1 Peter 4:7-11, 5:1-5, and the sermon below, Peter's ethical instructions to Christians reflect obligations and authority structures from antiquity. Nevertheless, Peter patterns the Christian community on the family not solely for pragmatic and evangelistic reasons.<sup>3</sup> Peter is deepening a theological framework of "spiritual house" introduced in 1 Peter 2:4-10 as God's dwelling place fulfilled in Jesus Christ and Christian believers (1 Pet 2:5). Christ-followers as God's "household" represent not only God's presence on earth but are also God's family through union with Christ and the new birth (1 Pet 1:3).<sup>4</sup> Therefore, as God's "household," Christians have obligations to their Christian brothers and sisters between Jesus's first and second advents.

### Sermon 6

Here is a familiar scenario: An entrepreneurial businessperson spends all his time and energy expanding his business. However, after spending his time and energy expanding, the leader has little energy left for the people and support structures his business needs to succeed. Failure is the result.

As Peter has expounded on Christians' mission living between Jesus's first and second advents, Peter does not neglect to address the support structures necessary for mission success. First Peter 4:7-11 and 5:1-5 reveal that God's mission for Christian believers does not mean neglecting their Christian relationships. On the contrary, because of the difficulty of living between Jesus's first and second advents, Christians'

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<sup>3</sup> Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on I Peter*, ed. Ferdinand Hahn, trans. John E. Alsup (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 173-74. Goppelt observes, "In this letter the code is intended to point the reader to a critical and responsible manner of life in the institutions of society, which becomes a missionary witness."

<sup>4</sup> McCartney suggests, "In 1 Peter, particularly in 1 Peter 2:4-10, the two concepts of 'house of God'—God's dwelling and God's family—are completely merged." D. C. McCartney, "House, Spiritual House," in Martin and Davids, *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, 510. Davids identifies the new birth in 1 Pet 1:3 as also contributing to Peter's theology of the Christian family (cf. 1 Pet 1:22-23). Peter H. Davids, *A Theology of James, Peter, and Jude*, Biblical Theology of the New Testament 6 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 172-73.

relationships with one another and the leadership structures God gives to the Christian community are as critical as the mission itself.

### **The Critical Need for Community and Leadership (4:7a; 5:1a)**

Christians must build strong communities and embrace leadership structures because of the challenging circumstances associated with redemptive history's end: "The end of all things is at hand" (4:7a).<sup>5</sup> Readers might assume that Peter's statement about the approaching end of redemptive history will prompt further instructions in 4:7-11 and 5:1-5, urging Christian believers to double down on evangelistic efforts. Indeed, Christians should recognize the urgency that Jesus's advent and redemptive work create. Jesus's first advent ushered in the concluding chapter of redemptive history; all that remains now is for Christ to return. At Jesus's second advent, history will end, and eternity will begin. Recognizing that Christ-followers live in the end times gives urgency to Christian ministry.

While Peter's chronological statement gives urgency, Peter employs a chronological statement for another purpose: to justify the critical need Christians have for strong community and leadership. First Peter 4:7-11 contains four exhortations addressing attitudes and actions within the Christian community. By using "therefore," Peter justifies the first and likely all four exhortations on living in redemptive history's final chapter (4:7).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians*, vol. 2 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 2:202. Witherington summarizes the view that Christians live in the final chapter of redemptive history. He argues, "Peter is agreeing with other New Testament writers that the eschatological age has broke in with the incarnation of Christ (cf. 1 Pet 1:20), and since Christ's death and resurrection, there are no other major eschatological events left before the End. Thus, one can say in earnest, the End is at hand, seen from the perspective of significant events that must precede the End." Jobes affirms, "While modern readers may immediately think of the end of the world, the semantic range of the word *telos* suggests more than mere termination and may refer to the last stage of a process as well as to its outcome or goal." Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 275.

<sup>6</sup> Jobes, *1 Peter*, 276.

First Peter 5:1-5 addresses the role of leaders within the Christian community: “so I exhort the elders” (5:1). Like 4:7a, the conjunction “so” also justifies Peter’s instructions to leaders on the difficult circumstances of the final chapter (5:1; cf. 4:12-19).<sup>7</sup> As a result, the instructions to the Christian community in 4:7-11 and 5:1-5 reflect the hardships the Christian community may experience.

Throughout the letter, Peter characterizes the end times as a challenging period to live for Jesus and his followers. Conversely, Peter has already shown that tribulation does not threaten Christians’ eternal rewards, and Jesus’s death and resurrection assure Christians’ ultimate victory (3:13-4:6). Therefore, Christ-followers can pursue their mission without sinful fear. However, Christians cannot fulfill their redemptive work alone or make leadership optional. Because of the duress many Christian believers face, community solidarity and healthy leadership structures are critical for Christian churches to survive and thrive.<sup>8</sup> In the final chapter, Christians need one another!

### **Build Strong Christian Communities in the End Times (4:7-11)**

Living in the final chapter requires strong Christian communities. Resiliency under threat, however, is not automatic but results from specific attitudes and actions practiced by Christian churches. Christians build strong communities with clear and sensible thinking and the normative patterns of Christian discipleship.

**Think clearly and sensibly (4:7b).** Peter first addresses the mindset of Christ-followers living between Jesus’s first and second advents and the positive impact a

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<sup>7</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter: A Commentary on 1 Peter, Hermeneia* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 322. Achtemeier argues, “Discussion of the necessary characteristics of leaders within the Christian community is placed here not to provide advice on how the community is to be organized, however, but because in the testing situation discussed in 4:12-19, effective pastoral leadership is indispensable if the community is to survive.”

<sup>8</sup> John H. Elliott, *1 Peter*, *The Anchor Yale Bible*, vol. 37B (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 764.

proper mindset can have, especially on prayer. Peter already addressed Christians' mindset in 1:13. There, Peter counseled them to remain "sober" concerning the object of their hope, and Peter again counsels clear thinking (4:7b; cf. 1:13). Living in the end times requires a balance between urgency and faithfulness.<sup>9</sup> The current chapter requires urgency because Jesus could return at any time and faithfulness because Christians do not know when he will return. Maintaining both urgency and faithfulness is a difficult balance to strike. Some Christian believers emphasizing the imminence of Jesus's return may neglect their duties while waiting for his return. Others, the longer Jesus tarries, may grow complacent and lose focus and intentionality (cf. Luke 12:42-48). Therefore, only a "sober" mind can evaluate every value and priority and arrive at a balanced assessment fitting for the times (4:7; cf. 1 Thess 5:6-8).

Furthermore, Christians must decide and act. Where fear can drive automatic reactions, and complacency can lead to despair, effective decision-making requires good sense or "self-control" (4:7). Peter imagines the Christian community can navigate a difficult chapter of salvation history solely by exercising clear and sensible thinking.

While a "sober mind" and "self-control" strengthen the Christian community in all aspects of its life together, Peter expects the immediate impact to be on a congregation's prayer life (4:7). Living in the end times requires a balanced approach to life and ministry, and it also requires a balanced approach to prayer. Praying with a focus on the future while emphasizing the present is a difficult balance to strike, but if found, it will yield powerful results.<sup>10</sup> Prayer, after all, is the community's lifeline.<sup>11</sup> In part, the success of the Christian community in the last chapter depends on successful prayers (cf.

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<sup>9</sup> Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians*, 2:203.

<sup>10</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 181.

<sup>11</sup> Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 157.

3:7). A community cannot hope to survive independently (2 Pet 1:3). Through prayer, a church receives God's wisdom and power to make decisions and overcome difficulty. Christian communities that pray from a clear and sensible understanding of their place in salvation history will receive God's guidance and help to face the future successfully.

**Carry on the normative patterns of discipleship (4:8-11).** Redemptive history's final chapter is also not the time to lean away from strengthening churches through discipleship. Strong churches result from Christians carrying on the discipleship patterns God commands. Remarkably, Peter does not prescribe new discipleship practices but urges churches to lean into the normative discipleship patterns of love, hospitality, and service.<sup>12</sup>

Strong Christian churches carry on practicing sacrificial love (4:8). Where the urgency of history's end may tempt Christ-followers to put love on a timetable, Peter reminds churches that there is no timetable for love: "Above all, keep loving one another earnestly" (4:8). Peter highlights love's relevance and supreme importance for the challenges churches will face. Peter argues that love is crucial to a church's inner life and unity, especially when times are hard because love "covers a multitude of sins" (4:8). Peter is not saying love hides sins since it is unloving to conceal sin under a blanket like it never happened. Instead, love deals with sin since sin can hurt, wound, and tear community relationships. Nevertheless, when or before hurt happens, love can soften the damaging effects of sin. Take the sharpest piece of jagged glass and cover it in a blanket, and someone can handle a sharp object without injury. Like a blanket, love softens sins and makes sins' hurts manageable and less damaging to unity. If a church learns to love, there is no sin too severe for the community to overcome.

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2003), 211.



In addition, strong churches carry on helping one another (4:9). Offering hospitality to others, usually strangers, often inviting them into the home and providing for their needs, was a prized virtue in the ancient world.<sup>13</sup> In 1 Peter, “house” already served as a metaphor for the Christian community as the new temple where God dwells (2:4-5). Here, Peter further develops the metaphor of the Christian community into a “household” or family that Christ-followers are born into through faith in Christ. As families had obligations to show hospitality in the ancient world, Christians must help other Christian believers.<sup>14</sup> With the home serving as a place where Christians gathered for worship, fellowship, and safety in the first century, Christians relied upon “showing hospitality” to one another (4:9).<sup>15</sup> As churches experienced hardship and marginalization, the need for hospitality increased. Therefore, strong Christian communities result when Christians help one another.

In commanding Christ-followers to help one another, Peter’s command includes the stipulation to help without “grumbling” (4:9). Helping others is challenging under any circumstance. How much more so in redemptive history’s final chapter! Grumbling characterized God’s family at other times in salvation history (1 Cor 10:10; cf. Exod 16:2).<sup>16</sup> On the contrary, grumbling must not characterize God’s family between the time of Jesus’s first and second advents.

Finally, strong Christian churches carry on serving one another (4:10). Peter continues to compare the Christian community to a family, with Christians fulfilling acts

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<sup>13</sup> Elliott, *1 Peter*, 752.

<sup>14</sup> Joel B. Green, *1 Peter*, The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 145.

<sup>15</sup> Green, *1 Peter*, 145.

<sup>16</sup> P. E. Enns, “Grumbling,” in Alexander and Rosner, *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 529.

of service as household “stewards” (cf. Luke 12:42).<sup>17</sup> Service characterized Jesus’s actions and now characterizes Christians’ actions which follow his example (John 13:15-16). Peter states that there is no excuse for Christian believers not to serve one another because God equips them for service as an expression of his “grace” (4:11). All Christians, from greatest to least, have something to contribute to the community because of the gracious “gifts” they received from God (4:10). The question is whether Christ-followers will use their spiritual gifts to strengthen the community. Thus, Peter urges Christians to use their gifts not for themselves but “to serve one another” (4:10).

Discussion of spiritual gifts is routine in the NT letters (Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:8-10). Unlike Paul’s more extensive lists of gifts, Peter limits his description to proclamation and service. Peter is either singling out two gifts or is more likely describing broad categories of word-oriented and service-oriented gifts.<sup>18</sup> As Christians exercise their gifts in the church, Peter emphasizes that Christians’ ability to use their gifts is “by the strength that God supplies” (4:11). Thus, Christians cannot serve each other apart from God’s help.

**Conclusion.** Christ-followers build strong communities with clear and sensible thinking and the normative discipleship practices of love, hospitality, and service. Churches that put Peter’s words into practice will survive and thrive in redemptive history’s final chapter. However, Peter’s goal is more than survival and success in the mission God has given the Christian community between Jesus’s first and second advents. The greater goal of love, hospitality, and service is not missional but

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<sup>17</sup> BDAG, οἰκονόμος, 698. “Manager of a household or estate, (*house*) *steward, manager.*” Emphasis original.

<sup>18</sup> Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 298.

doxological: “that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ” (4:11; cf. 2:12).<sup>19</sup>

### **Embrace Leadership Structures in the End Times (5:1-5)**

Direction and oversight are also necessary for churches' survival in the end times.<sup>20</sup> When problems arise, someone must help a church find solutions and coordinate the community's response. In the last chapter, the leaders responsible for leading the Christian community are each congregation's pastors or “elders”: “So I exhort the elders among you” (5:1a).<sup>21</sup> The existence of pastors or “elders” who direct the Christian community continues to reflect Peter's understanding of the Christian community as a family. For instance, not only was the family prominent in antiquity, but influence within the family resulted from seniority, where older male members exercised influence over the family.<sup>22</sup> Also, because of the family's prominence in society, senior male members or “elders” of influential families were also society's leaders (Exod 3:16; Matt 21:23).<sup>23</sup> Therefore, reflecting the influence of elders in the home and society, Christian

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<sup>19</sup> Goppelt, *A Commentary on I Peter*, 305. Goppelt argues, “This purpose clause articulates, finally, the goal of the three previous statements. . . and, beyond that, of the entire section on congregational life” (4:7-11).

<sup>20</sup> Elliott, *I Peter*, 812. Elliot observes, “It is more likely that the foregoing discussion of suffering in 4:12-19 led naturally to an appeal to elders as leaders of the flock, for the suffering readers would need reliable leaders to guide them in their predicament.”

<sup>21</sup> Because the title “pastor” is used in my context for the office and leadership responsibilities Peter assigns to elders, I use pastors and elders interchangeably throughout this section.

<sup>22</sup> R. Alastair Campbell, *The Elders: Seniority Within Earliest Christianity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 240-41.

<sup>23</sup> Campbell, *The Elders*, 240-41. Campbell discusses the role of elders in Greek and Roman society on pgs. 67-96. Scholars debate whether elders in the earliest churches were influential family members or appointed into an “office” as was the case in later NT churches, or both (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). See also Benjamin L. Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 70-71. For the argument that elder and overseer are the same NT office, see Merkle, 76-83.

congregations were also led by pastors or “elders,” many of whom may have been elders in their families as well (5:5; Acts 20:17; Jas 5:14).<sup>24</sup>

Even though the presence of pastors or “elders” in churches reflected the structure of the family, the elders’ function in the Christian “household” was theological, reflecting salvation history’s final chapter.<sup>25</sup> For example, Peter exhorts the elders to “shepherd the flock of God” (5:2). Throughout salvation history, leaders or “shepherds” led God’s people and cared for them (Num 27:17; 2 Sam 5:2). In the final chapter Jesus leads God’s “flock” as the “good shepherd” who suffered and sacrificed his life for the sheep (John 10:11). Consequently, Peter’s command to “shepherd,” associates elders with Jesus Christ. Pastors or “elders” share Jesus’s responsibility to shepherd God’s flock in the end times.

Second, pastors’ or “elders” function in local churches is to “watch over” the flock as a shepherd watches sheep (Acts 20:28 NIV). However, the danger to the Christian “flock” is not from predators inflicting physical harm but inflicting spiritual damage through false teaching resulting in apostasy (Acts 20:28-31).<sup>26</sup> In the NT, the threat of false teaching and apostasy are not isolated incidents but characterize the times between Jesus’s first and second advents (Matt 24:3-5; 2 Tim 4:3). Therefore, pastors’ or “elders” function in the NT to “watch over” the flock is theologically prescriptive for the threats God’s people face in the end times.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 322. Achtemeier says, “Although ‘elder,’ along with ‘bishop’ and ‘deacon,’ emerged within NT times as the title of a specific church official, it is not clear to what extent such organization was already present in the churches to which the letter is addressed.”

<sup>25</sup> James M. Hamilton Jr., “Did the Church Borrow Leadership Structures from the Old Testament or Synagogue?,” in *Shepherding God’s Flock: Biblical Leadership in the New Testament and Beyond*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Benjamin L. Merkle (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 25. Hamilton insists, “Focusing on the word ‘elder’ to the exclusion of more thematic issues could keep us from seeing the massive continuity between the Old and New Testaments regarding the righteous sufferer who shepherds God’s people.”

<sup>26</sup> Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 823.

<sup>27</sup> Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 823.

Given elders' responsibility between Jesus's first and second advents, if churches are going to survive and thrive, Christian communities must have pastors or "elders" who lead like Jesus (5:1-4). Second, churches must submit to their pastors or "elders" since leadership is only effective if followed (5:5a). Finally, everyone in the Christian community must think less of themselves (5:5b).

**Pastors must lead like Jesus (5:1-4).** The responsibility pastors or "elders" have for a local congregation reflects the circumstances of the concluding chapter of redemptive history, where Jesus is physically absent. The Christian community does not need pastors in the age to come because Jesus is present. Yet because Christ is absent, pastors lead Christian congregations until he "appears" (5:4).

Even though Jesus is absent, he retains full authority and leadership as God's flock's perfect shepherd (John 10:1-20). Jesus Christ fulfilled God's OT promise to provide an ideal human shepherd who will regather God's people and reign over an eternal kingdom (Ezek 34:11-24). Nevertheless, in his absence, Jesus chose to establish subordinate leaders as his undershepherds to oversee the Christian community on his behalf (Jer 3:15). For example, Christ commissioned Peter into an undershepherd role in the Gospel of John (John 21:15-19).<sup>28</sup> The NT further extended the undershepherd duties beyond Peter and the apostles to pastors or "elders" (5:1; Acts 20:28).<sup>29</sup> Pastors or "elders," as a result, are responsible for local congregations in Jesus's absence.

Jesus's arrangement for undershepherds reflects the OT arrangement, where human shepherds served as God's undershepherds, with one helpful development: Jesus,

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<sup>28</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 1237.

<sup>29</sup> Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons*, 55-56. "Elder(s)" is not the only term in the NT for Christians leaders. The NT teaches two offices in the church—"overseers" and "deacons" (Phil 1:1). Merkle notes that "the term 'overseer,' or 'bishop,' (*episkopos*) refers to the same office as that held by the person given the title 'elder' (*presbuteros*, eg., Acts 14:23; 1 Tim 5:17)." Emphasis original. In addition, Merkle argues from 1 Pet 5:2 that the function of pastoring (i.e., shepherding) describes elders' primary calling and, as a result "the two terms should be viewed as referring to the same office."

as the “chief Shepherd,” is the model and standard for elders called by him to “shepherd the flock of God” in the end times (5:2).<sup>30</sup> Before Jesus, salvation history lacked a positive human model for undershepherds. Moses and David possessed many positive leadership qualities, but most examples of human shepherds in the OT were negative (cf. Ezek 34:1-10). Therefore, while Jesus retains his place as the shepherd of the sheep, his undershepherds must lead in a way that reflects his servant leadership until his return (Mark 10:42-44).

First, pastors or “elders” lead like Jesus by leading “not under compulsion, but willingly” (5:2). Unlike the hireling whose obligation to the sheep prevented him from sacrificing for the sheep, Jesus, the model shepherd, sacrificed his life for the sheep (John 10:11). Leading churches in redemptive history’s final chapter is challenging. Peter, as a “witness of the sufferings of Christ,” also describes his experience as a “fellow elder” as one characterized by suffering (5:1). Hence, suffering is part of the job description of a pastor or “elder.” Only a pastor’s internal desire can motivate him to serve the Christian community and not abandon a church when things get hard.

Second, pastors or “elders” lead like Jesus “not for shameful gain, but eagerly” (5:2). One characteristic of the OT shepherds God condemned was how they used their position for personal profit at the expense of God’s flock (Ezek 34:1-10). Shepherding is not without rewards. Peter says that faithful undershepherds stand to receive a “crown of glory” at Christ’s return (5:4). Further, elders are eligible to receive compensation for their service (1 Tim 5:17-18). However, like Jesus, the motivation of pastors or “elders” should not be “what can I get?” but rather “what can I give?” Christ, rather than using his position for personal gain, used his position to accomplish redemption through suffering

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<sup>30</sup> Feldmeier, *The First Letter of Peter*, 236. Feldmeier argues, “Christ as ἀρχιποιμήν is more than just the ‘chief’ of all shepherds; as the ‘good shepherd’ who offered himself for his sheep . . . he is the epitome, ‘archetype’ of every office of shepherd as of an alternative ‘serving’ way of dealing with the power entrusted to one over other people.”

service (Matt 20:28). Pastors likewise benefit the churches they lead when their motivation is to serve.

Finally, pastors or “elders” lead like Jesus by “not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock” (5:3). Pastors affect change in churches by positive example as they demonstrate Christlike behavior. For instance, Paul, in his ministry, sought to imitate Jesus and called his followers to imitate him: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). Peter’s desire for the Christian community to have an example to follow reflects a first-century understanding of discipleship, where followers conformed their lives to the lifestyle of an exemplary teacher. Through imitation, pastors serve as real-life examples of Jesus for congregations to follow. While Christ is physically absent from the Christian community during the final chapter of salvation history, when pastors or “elders” lead as he leads, Jesus’s powerful example remains.

**Communities must submit to their pastors (5:5a).** Local congregations must accept the leadership pastors or “elders” provide to survive and thrive. As before, the household continues to serve as a metaphor for the Christian community where not only hospitality and service but also authority and submission characterized the home (2:18; 3:1). In a household, the “younger” members of the household submit to the authority of the older household members (5:5a). While age was never a qualification for elders in society or churches in the first century, influence in the family usually went according to age.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, many older members of Christian households were also the pastors or “elders” of the congregations that met in homes. Reflecting a household structure, Peter urges “younger” congregation members to submit to “elders” who were most likely older

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<sup>31</sup> Campbell, *The Elders*, 247. Campbell observes about elders in ancient society, “Elders are always representative. It would be untrue to suggest that a person was an elder because of age alone; wealth also played its part. But wealth, being related for the most part to land, was closely tied up in families, and the headship of the family usually went according to age.”

than them. Just as a household depends on authority and submission to thrive, God's family also requires submission.

**Everyone must think less of themselves (5:5b).** Even where pastors or "elders" lead like Jesus and the community submits, relationships characterized by authority and submission are difficult, even in the best times. Add the challenges of living in the end times, and the most unified congregation will still experience tension. As a result, Peter urges everyone in the Christian community to think of themselves less by exercising "humility" toward one another (5:5b). Selfishness among pastors and church members threatens unity and cohesion. Yet Peter does not imagine that giving deference to others is automatic; instead, Christians must choose humility daily, just as they "clothe" themselves daily (5:5b). Also, as an added motivation to resist selfishness and practice humility, Peter reminds Christ-followers that God acts in judgment against pride but "gives grace to the humble" (5:5; cf. Prov 3:34 LXX). Christian communities living in the end times need all the help they can receive, especially God's help. Practicing humility secures God's help between Jesus's first and second advents.

**Conclusion.** Churches that embrace the leadership structures Jesus provides will thrive in the end times. Jesus Christ is God's perfect shepherd who leads his people into eternity. Therefore, pastors or "elders" who lead like Jesus will avoid past leadership failures and ensure the Christian flock's survival until his return. Furthermore, since a church functions like a household, members must do their part to carry out the submission that makes a household successful. Finally, pride is a grave threat to a church. Christian communities must make a daily decision to give deference to one another to maintain unity and attract God's favor.



## **Application**

Recognizing that churches like Valley Baptist Church exist in salvation history's final chapter should bring urgency to ministry. Sadly, churches today do not often demonstrate urgency. Looking at many churches, an observer would not know that churches are undertaking ministry in the end times. When churches feel the urgency and put effort into activities outside the church's walls, sometimes essential internal practices such as love, hospitality, and service are neglected. Worse, some churches and organizations have hidden or overlooked sinful actions because revealing them might hurt the mission. For instance, in 2022, an investigation revealed that the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention overlooked clergy abuses the committee knew about because revealing the abuse would hurt the convention's reputation and ability to conduct its evangelistic goals.<sup>32</sup>

However, as 1 Peter 4:7-11 and 5:1-5 argue, the church's internal life remains as crucial as ministry outside the church's walls. When churches succeed at ministry outside the walls but neglect to nurture the church's internal life, they still fail. Churches have a greater mission than reaching people outside the walls, which is God's glory. Churches that fail to protect the most vulnerable at the expense of other priorities fail to give God glory and must repent. Because ministry within the church's walls gives as much glory to God as ministry outside, ministry inside the church remains essential.

Moreover, congregations can minimize abuse by pastors and the unrealistic expectations church members place on them by recognizing that pastors are not the chief shepherds of the flock. Instead, pastors are only undershepherds and provide direction and oversight on Jesus's behalf. Consequently, as undershepherds, pastors benefit the church by providing leadership like Jesus.

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<sup>32</sup> "Guidepost Solutions' Report of the Independent Investigation," May 2022, <https://www.sataskforce.net/updates/guidepost-solutions-report-of-the-independent-investigation>.

Finally, as important as the church's internal life is to its strength, it is not as if churches must neglect ministry outside the walls. Peter aims not to pit one against the other; both are crucial. Building strong Christian communities and embracing leadership structures will strengthen the church's ministries inside and outside, leading to greater health, effectiveness, and glory to God.

### **Conclusion**

During World War II, Britain faced the threat of German invasion, which should have made everyday life cease. Nevertheless, the most helpful thing the people of Britain did was to continue going about their lives. It seemed counterintuitive to get up in the morning, go to work, go to the grocery store, and raise their families even as the bombs fell. Nonetheless, Britain succeeded in a challenging chapter by continuing as it had before. Likewise, local churches must adopt the same attitude between Jesus's first and second advents. The final chapter of redemptive history is not the time to lean away from nurturing a church's inner life. Instead, it is time to lean in, invest, and carry on with the tasks and structures that build strong churches.

## CHAPTER 8

### SERMON 7: WHEN PERSECUTION STRIKES (1 PETER 4:12-19; 5:6-11)

#### **Introduction**

The first man, Adam, owed God his complete devotion. The serpent's deception, however, revealed Adam's lack of commitment. When tested, Adam failed (Gen 3:6).<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, Adam's testing was not unique in salvation history.<sup>2</sup> For example, Satan incited David into counting his army (1 Chr 21:1).<sup>3</sup> False prophets deceived Israel (Deut 13:3). Satan tormented Job and nearly shipwrecked his faith (Job 1-2). Finally, God tested Israel in the wilderness and allowed the surrounding nations to persecute them (Deut 8:2; Judg 2:21-23). The theme of testing recurs throughout the biblical story.

Although the testing of Adam and others revealed unfaithfulness, Jesus's devotion under trial exemplified the commitment God deserved. Jesus Christ resisted Satan's lies and remained faithful amid trials, even death on the cross (Mark 1:12-13; Heb 2:18). Thus, by passing the test, Jesus reversed the adverse effects of Adam's fall and secured God's blessing for himself and those who trust him.

Because of Jesus's success, one might expect no further tests—other than the final judgment at the end of time—as redemptive history ends (Matt 25:31-32). On the contrary, Christ's death was the beginning of the final judgment which will climax at his

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<sup>1</sup> Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 778.

<sup>2</sup> G. H. Twelftree, "Testing," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 814-15.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Sam 24:1 attributes the incitement to Yahweh.

return (Isa 34:4; Joel 2:32; cf. Matt 24:29; John 12:31; Acts 2:20; Rev 6:13).<sup>4</sup> Therefore, 1 Peter 4:12-19 and 5:6-11 reveal that Christian persecution is also God's final judgment and test (4:17).<sup>5</sup> As redemptive history comes to a close, God is already testing and separating his people from those who are not (John 3:18).<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, as God allowed Satan to judge Christ's devotion and God's people in prior eras, Satan now deceives and persecutes Christians between Jesus's first and second advents (1 Pet 5:8-9). In terms of 1 Peter 4:12-19, 5:6-11, and the following sermon, persecution demands a proper response.<sup>7</sup> Because persecution is a test and an expression of God's final judgment, Christians must be prepared.

### Sermon 7

Many circumstances are outside a person's control. For example, a person has no control over the weather; it will rain, snow, or cloud over, regardless of what they decide. What they do control is how they respond to circumstances. As an illustration, when children are treated unkindly, they sometimes retaliate. When confronted, children may blame their bad behavior on the bullying they received. However, a poor response to

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<sup>4</sup> G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 948. Beale argues, "The NT portrays the final judgment as beginning, and that it begins with Christ's crucifixion, where he suffers the final judgement. . . . In this the final judgment has been pushed back from the very end of history to the cross of Christ in the first century." Carson observes, "Judgement. . . is in one sense reserved for the end of the age, for the 'last judgment'. But. . . judgment begins with the first coming of Christ, climaxing in his passion." D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 442-43.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Dubis, *Messianic Woes in First Peter: Suffering and Eschatology in 1 Peter 4:12-19*, Studies in Biblical Literature 33 (New York: P. Lang, 2002) 33:145. Dubis observes, "God's judgment was centered in Jesus, but it has spread from there to impact those united to Christ, and only afterwards will it finally extend to unbelievers."

<sup>6</sup> Many commentators point out that God's judgment can denote condemnation but also the act of judging itself with no sense of condemnation or punishment in view. See Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 293.

<sup>7</sup> Due to length, I delivered 1 Peter 4:12-19 and 5:6-11 in separate sermons but present them as one sermon here.

others' poor behavior is not permissible, especially for Christian believers responding to persecution.

Like the weather, persecution is beyond Christians' control. Undergoing persecution in Jesus's name is characteristic of living in redemptive history's final chapter (4:12). As a result, Christ-followers do not get to decide whether they will face suffering for their faith. The goal of 1 Peter 4:12-19 and 5:6-11 is to shape the response of Christians to persecution. They may be unable to control how others treat them, but they can choose how to respond.

### **Prepare in Advance for Persecution**

Christians who experience persecution for the first time often respond poorly. After all, Jesus prepared his disciples for the inevitability of his suffering on the cross (Mark 8:31-32). Yet not only did the disciples not accept his predictions, but when Jesus's hour of suffering arrived, his disciples fled, leaving him to face his agony alone (Mark 14:50). Even Peter denied Jesus three times after claiming he would die for him (Matt 26:69-75; cf. Matt 26:35).

If Jesus's disciples did not respond well to their first encounter with persecution, it is reasonable to expect that unprepared Christians will find persecution even more challenging. Therefore, the sooner Christians prepare themselves for persecution, the better. The benefit of being prepared is that they will stand firm when persecution strikes and remain faithful to God's mission (5:12). Peter urges Christian believers who are facing harm to respond with joy, instead of surprise and praise, instead of shame, as well as to trust God, accept persecution, and stay committed to Jesus Christ. Thus, Christians will be prepared when persecution strikes.

## **Respond with Joy, Instead of Surprise (4:12-14)**

According to Peter, an improper response to persecution is to be caught off guard: “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you” (4:12). Responding with surprise is appropriate in some circumstances, for example, at a surprise birthday party. However, for most Christians living between Jesus’s first and second advents, persecution is not “strange” but expected. Earlier in the letter, Peter explained why Christ-followers should consider persecution a normal experience. First, suffering reflected Christians’ place in salvation history as persecution characterizes salvation history’s final chapter (1:6). Second, persecution displayed solidarity with Christ and his suffering (2:21). Finally, suffering had a sanctifying function whereby God used suffering to assess and refine faith like gold being tested and refined by fire (1:7).

Persecution’s sanctifying function is what Peter recalls first for shaping Christians’ response. Peter’s description of the trials Christian believers experience as “fiery” is reminiscent of his previous statements about fire in chapter one and reminds Christians again of persecution’s function to purify and strengthen faith (1:7).<sup>8</sup> When Christians remember that God uses persecution to test and strengthen faith, persecution should not catch them by surprise.

If an improper response to suffering is surprise, a proper response is joy (4:13). By commanding joy, Peter does not conclude that Christ-followers are to find happiness in suffering itself.<sup>9</sup> Glorifying persecution or martyrdom is a misunderstanding of the Bible’s teaching on suffering. Instead, the joy Christians experience from

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<sup>8</sup> Some commentators also see a sanctifying function of persecution in 1 Pet 4:1. See John H. Elliott, *1 Peter*, The Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 37B (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 717.

<sup>9</sup> Elliot, *1 Peter*, 808. Elliot argues, “Our author is neither encouraging a ‘preparation for martyrdom’ . . . nor forestalling a quest for ‘the glory of martyrdom’ . . . Our author’s statements involve no glorification of suffering as such. Innocent suffering is seen as a means to an end—union with Christ, demonstration of faith’s probity, and glorification of God.”

persecution comes from suffering's significance. Persecution creates joy because persecution identifies Christians with Jesus Christ and assures the Holy Spirit's help.

**Persecution identifies Christians with Jesus (4:13).** As stated above, one explanation Peter gives for Christian persecution is the solidarity suffering creates with Jesus (4:1-2). Persecution characterized Christ's life as he pursued God's redemptive purposes. Thus, suffering brings Christ-followers into solidarity with Jesus as they "share Christ's sufferings" (4:13). As Christians carry out God's redemptive work and suffer, they follow Jesus's steps. (4:13; cf. 2:21). Thus, suffering in solidarity with Jesus results in joy because sharing his persecution is a privilege.

Nevertheless, Peter does not limit the joy Christian believers experience to present happiness. Any happiness they experience is a "taste" of the greater joy Christians will experience when Jesus returns (cf. 1:6-7).<sup>10</sup> After all, the path of obedience Jesus traveled did not terminate in persecution but in glory, as he was victorious over sin, death, and evil (3:18-22; cf. 1:11). Furthermore, Christ's victory was substitutionary and vindictive for Christ-followers who unite themselves to him by faith. Hence, by design, solidarity with Jesus through shared suffering results in solidarity with him in shared "glory," as Christ frees Christian believers from sin, death, and evil (cf. 5:1, 4).<sup>11</sup> However, Christians do not experience total vindication and victory due to Jesus's work until his second advent (1:7; 5:4). Nevertheless, his return is assured, and Christians can rejoice.

**Persecution assures the Holy Spirit's help (4:14).** Christ-followers also experience happiness or "blessing" because of the Spirit's help: "If you are insulted for

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<sup>10</sup> Jobes, *1 Peter*, 287.

<sup>11</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 152. Marshall insists, "Peter's thought also includes, at least implicitly, the fact that Christ's followers will share in his glory, just as they have shared in his sufferings."

the name of Christ you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you” (4:14).<sup>12</sup> For instance, Stephen, when he suffered martyrdom, did not suffer alone. During his trial, Stephen received the blessing of the Holy Spirit’s help to proclaim Jesus and forgive his opponents (Acts 6:10, 15; 7:55). However, the Spirit’s help in persecution is not limited to Stephen but given to every Christian when “insulted for the name of Christ” (4:14). Peter’s statement reflects Jesus’s statements in the Gospels, where he promised the Spirit’s help to all his followers when they faced persecution (Matt 10:19-20; Luke 12:11-12). Thus, every Christian living between Christ’s advents experiences the Spirit’s blessing when people persecute them.<sup>13</sup>

Peter’s promise of the Spirit’s help amid persecution reflects Jesus’s words, but OT promises as well, suggesting a permanent rather than sporadic experience of the Spirit.<sup>14</sup> Peter’s statement that the Spirit “rests” upon suffering Christians quotes Isaiah 11:2, where God’s Spirit would “rest” on the Messiah in the last days: “And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him” (Isa 11:2). Jesus Christ as the Spirit anointed-Messiah experienced the Spirit’s help throughout his earthly ministry in fulfillment of Isaiah 11:2 (cf. Mark 1:10). However, because of Christians’ solidarity with Jesus in suffering, the same Spirit who “rests” on Jesus also rests on every Christian living between Jesus’s first and second advents (Acts 2:3; Eph 1:13-14; cf. Isa 44:2-3; Isa 59:21). Therefore, as

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<sup>12</sup> BDAG, μακάριος, 610. “pert. to being esp. favored, blessed, fortunate, happy, privileged, fr. a transcendent perspective.”

<sup>13</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, International Critical Commentary, vol. 2 (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 185. Davis and Allison understand Jesus’s words in the gospels to promise a unique experience of the Spirit to persecuted Christians where “the Spirit was naturally thought to be most manifest in times of crisis or great difficulty.” Goppelt gives a similar understanding for 4:14. He states, “The main part of the verse is a promise: When you are abused you are blessed, since *then* the Spirit comes as support to help you and gives you a share in God’s glory.” Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on I Peter*, ed. Ferdinand Hahn, trans. John E. Alsup (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 325. Emphasis original.

<sup>14</sup> Dubis, *Messianic Woes in First Peter*, 33:118-122. Dubis and many commentators understand a more permanent experience of the Spirit in 1 Pet 1:10 because of how Peter’s words closely parallel Isa 11:2 and other OT promises of the Spirit’s permanent presence on the Messiah and God’s people in the last days (Isa 44:2-3; 59:21).



Christ experienced the Spirit's blessing throughout his ministry, so Peter assures the Spirit's blessing on persecuted Christians.

### **Respond with Praise, Instead of Shame (4:15-16)**

No one should feel ashamed when accused of being a "Christian." Peter continues to shape Christians' response to persecution. Peter first gives a list of shameful names: "murderer," "thief," "evildoer," and "meddler" (4:15). The names Peter lists were disgraceful in society's eyes in the first century, and some, if not all, were punishable crimes.<sup>15</sup> Peter mentions shameful names to clarify that not all suffering results in the Spirit's blessing. Many behaviors that are shameful in society are also disgraceful to God. Christian believers who practice shameful behaviors have no reason to expect the Holy Spirit's help. Instead, they must avoid disgraceful behaviors lest they experience the just condemnation of society and, as Peter warns later, God's judgment (4:17).

Although God and society agreed on many shameful behaviors, they disagreed on Christianity. Being a "Christian," though not illegal in the first century, was still shameful, suggested by the term's non-Christian origins and Jesus's followers' slow adoption to self-identify as "Christian" until well into the second century.<sup>16</sup> After all, significant misunderstanding and suspicion existed about Christianity in the first century.

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<sup>15</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter: A Commentary on 1 Peter*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 310. Achtemeier describes how murder and stealing were punishable crimes, whereas an evildoer was a general term that included punishable and non-punishable offenses (cf. Matt 27:23; Rom 13:4). The meaning of ἀλλοτρίεπισκοπος or "meddler" is debated and usually not thought to describe an illegal activity. Nevertheless, interpreters cannot rule out illegal activity because of its inclusion in a list of other illegal activities.

<sup>16</sup> Elliott, *1 Peter*, 790-91; Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 29-33. Christianity as a religion was not made illegal throughout the Roman Empire until well into the third century. Christians persecuted by Nero in the first century and Domitian in the second remained isolated events. Also, while religion was a factor, it was not the only factor.

Elliott describes how the only two uses of "Christian" in the book of Acts are by non-Christians (cf. Acts 11:25; 26:28). Furthermore, because King Agrippa mocks Paul in Acts 26:28, it is likely "Christian" already had a derogatory meaning.

Non-Christians frequently accused “Christians” of murder, cannibalism, and incest.<sup>17</sup> Christians’ refusal and avoidance of cultural practices led society to conclude that being a “Christian” was shameful with no social rewards. As a result, to avoid persecution in society’s eyes and later prosecution in the court of law, Christ-followers were tempted to adjust their behaviors to avoid social persecution, even renouncing the “Christian” name.

While society considered the name “Christian” a badge of shame to discard, Peter identifies “Christian” as a badge of honor to wear: “Praise God that you bear that name” (4:16b NIV). Rather than adjust their behavior and loyalties to avoid suffering, Christ-followers should continue to praise God for the privilege of being a Christian—even when friends and neighbors respond negatively. Peter’s command to praise includes, as in other Scriptures, giving verbal praise to God (cf. 1:3; Luke 2:20; Gal 1:24).<sup>18</sup> Anytime opponents identify a person as a Christian, Christ-followers should use the occasion to give God verbal praise.

However, being identified as “Christian” should also prompt Christian believers to continue honoring God in everything they do: “So that in all things God may be praised” (4:11).<sup>19</sup> God is honored by Christians’ choices and behaviors, even when they lead to public ridicule. At stake when Christ-followers change their behavior in response to ridicule is something more than name and reputation—God’s glory. Therefore, when opponents harm Christ-followers for their behavior, Christians should persist in living out their faith because it glorifies God.

### **Trust God (4:17-19)**

Peter continues to shape the response of Christians to persecution, also urging trust: “Therefore, let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a

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<sup>17</sup> David G. Horrell, *1 Peter*, New Testament Guides (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 90.

<sup>18</sup> Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 314.

<sup>19</sup> Dubis, *Messianic Woes in First Peter*, 33:136.

faithful Creator while doing good” (4:17-18). Peter’s command to trust results from God’s final judgment at the end of history, which Peter introduced earlier in 4:5. In 4:5, Peter first reminded Christians that opponents’ judgments were insignificant compared to God’s judgment at the end of history. Second, Peter encouraged Christians to expect a favorable outcome from God at the final judgment because they did not share their opponent’s ungodly actions and responded positively to the gospel.

In 4:17-19, Peter revisits the theme of final judgment from 4:5 and reveals a third truth about God’s final judgment: God’s final judgment is already underway: “For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God” (4:17). “Household” is already an essential metaphor for Peter because of the term’s identification with God’s OT family and temple dwelling. Earlier, Peter identified Christ-followers as God’s family and dwelling place from his understanding of how Jesus Christ and Christians fulfill God’s family and temple in redemptive history (2:5; 4:9-10). Thus, in 4:17, Peter continues to use God’s OT temple to understand God’s final judgment on Christians and non-Christians. For example, God’s judgment in Ezekiel 9:6 began with God’s temple sanctuary. So Peter concludes, based on the OT pattern, that God’s final judgment against Christ-followers occurs before non-Christians and is already underway, given Christ’s judgment on the cross, whose suffering Christians share (1 Cor 11:32; Col 1:24; 2 Thess 1:4-5).<sup>20</sup>

In associating the beginning of the final judgment with Jesus’s and Christians’ suffering, Peter raises the stakes to motivate Christians to remain faithful.<sup>21</sup> First, Christians must endure persecution because the persecution they experience is God’s

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<sup>20</sup> Most likely, Peter is alluding to Ezek 9:6 out of several OT passages that communicate that God’s judgment begins with his people (cf. Jer 25:59; Zech 13:9; Mal 3:1-5). On the other hand, Jobes claims that “the lack of precise lexical correspondence to any one of these passages suggests that Peter is not referring to any of them but is drawing on a familiar tradition in Judaism. . . . that the suffering that Peter’s readers are experiencing is an integral part of God’s eschatological judgment which all human beings must face.” Jobes, *1 Peter*, 292.

<sup>21</sup> Dubis, *Messianic Woes in First Peter*, 33:135.

final test. If persecution were a preliminary test, not the final one, endurance would be less critical. Christian believers, however, must remain faithful since, as the final judgment and test, there are no retakes.

Second, as persecution is God's final judgment, the consequences of failure are even harsher than persecution itself. Even as Peter notes that God's judgment begins with Christians, Peter states that God's judgment's severity increases later for unbelievers who reject the gospel (4:17). Thus, while rejecting Jesus results in short-term gains, the long-term consequences are steep. It is better to endure persecution now than even harsher punishment later when Christ returns.

Finally, passing the test of persecution is not automatic, even for Christians. Peter, quoting Proverbs, states that the margin between those God saves and damns is small (4:18; cf. Prov 11:31 LXX). If Christ-followers barely pass the test of persecution, it seems impossible that non-Christians pass.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, Christians' only hope for final salvation from a human perspective lies in enduring judgment and remaining faithful, even as, from God's perspective, every Christian succeeds (John 10:28-29).

Even though Peter motivates Christian believers with the steep consequences of unfaithfulness, the response Peter counsels for Christians is trust. Peter displayed a balance earlier in the letter between the need for human responsibility and divine aid in overcoming persecution, where Christians are "guarded by faith" but also by "God's power" (1:5). Therefore, even though Christ-followers have a responsibility to endure and remain faithful, at the same time, God preserves them from failing. Peter returns to the theme of human responsibility and divine aid in verses 17-19 but rests a successful outcome on God's faithfulness rather than human ability: "Entrust yourselves to a faithful Creator while doing good" (4:19). Because Christian persecution is part of God's final

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<sup>22</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2003), 229.

judgment, Christians, more than ever, must rely on God and his grace to preserve them. As an added motivation, Peter recommends trust in a “form” reminiscent of Jesus’s trusting prayer to the Father on the cross (Ps 31:5; cf. Luke 23:46).<sup>23</sup> As Jesus Christ succeeded in his redemptive mission by entrusting himself to the Father, Christian believers will succeed by trusting him as well.

### **Accept Persecution (5:6-7)**

A fourth response to suffering is acceptance: “Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God” (5:6). Peter encourages Christians to accept suffering when persecution enters their lives because persecution is part of God’s plan. In the OT, God’s “hand” represented judgments and trials that resulted from divine action. For example, Job’s afflictions were from God’s “hand” even as Satan carried them out (Job 19:21). Also, Exodus described the plagues on the Egyptians as also coming from God’s “hand” (Exod 3:19; 6:1; 13:3). Finally, while the language of God’s hand is absent, the trials experienced by Christ fulfilled God’s plan (Acts 2:23). Like previous judgments and trials, the persecution endured by Christ-followers also originates with “God’s hand” (5:6). Since God has determined to use persecution to test Christians, to compromise one’s faith to avoid persecution is to stand against God’s plans.

Even as Christian believers are to accept suffering, Peter reminds them why they must accept persecution. First, accepting persecution results in God’s favor. Earlier in 5:1-5, Peter addressed relationships within local churches where he encouraged humility over pride because God “gives grace to the humble” (5:5). In 5:6, Peter also encourages humility before God. By humbling themselves before fellow Christians *and* God, Christians align themselves with God’s plans. In this alignment, Christians

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<sup>23</sup> Reinhard Feldmeier, *The First Letter of Peter: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, trans. Peter H. Davids (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), 229. See also Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 173.

recognize that the same “hand” that allows persecution also has the power to “exalt” them in the end (5:6).

Second, Peter restates that humility brings Christ-followers into solidarity with Jesus Christ (cf. 4:13). Persecution is not Christians’ final experience. In solidarity with Jesus, whoever accepts persecution can expect vindication. Just as God exalted Christ, so will God “exalt” suffering believers (5:6). By accepting persecution, Christians, in solidarity with Jesus, ensure a positive outcome. Just a few verses later, Peter explains further the positive outcome for believers in the form of a promise: “The God of all grace. . . will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you” (5:10). For those who accept persecution, suffering does not last forever.

Finally, Peter reminds Christian believers that accepting persecution is a decision they make by “casting all your anxieties on him” (5:7). Suffering Christians will seek relief from their struggles somewhere. Nevertheless, Christians ensure a positive outcome only when they bring their concerns to God. Hearing that persecution is God’s plan may lead Christ-followers to conclude that God does not care for them. However, though trials are God’s plan, persecution does not mean God is uncaring or removed. Peter reveals that God cares for Christians even as he tests them. Therefore, Christians submit to persecution by bringing their concerns to God and, as a result, can expect a compassionate response.

### **Stay Committed to Jesus (5:8-11)**

Peter’s final response for Christians, when persecution strikes, is to double down on their commitment to Christ in response to Satan’s attacks: “Resist him, firm in your faith” (5:9). For Peter, not only is God behind Christians’ persecution, but so is Satan.<sup>24</sup> Satan’s involvement in the trials of salvation history’s final chapter is consistent

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<sup>24</sup> Elliot observes that “devil” and “Satan” are used “interchangeably in the NT for the chief supernatural enemy of God and his people.” Elliott, *1 Peter*, 855. Feldmeier notes how “devil” and “Satan”

with Satan's testing of Adam, David, and Jesus. By identifying the presence of Satan, Peter understands Christian persecution theologically. Christians' true enemy is Satan, not human opponents. Of course, when Christ-followers are harmed or slandered, opponents remain responsible and accountable to God for their actions.<sup>25</sup> Regardless, the final blame for the hostilities against Christians goes beyond the human opponents inflicting them. The blame rests on Satan, God's enemy, and the struggles predicted between the woman's and the serpent's offspring (cf. Gen 3:15).<sup>26</sup>

Satan's involvement in Christian persecution casts a dark shadow on persecution, raising the stakes for Christians to remain faithful.<sup>27</sup> Because of Satan's presence, Christian believers need to be "watchful" and "sober-minded" when persecution strikes (5:8). Just as a lion's roar indicates the presence of the lion, so persecution indicates Satan's presence. Thus, Christian believers must realize the eternal costs for those who succumb to persecution. Human opponents may tarnish Christians' reputations or societal positions. Nonetheless, Satan is after more than Christians' reputation or security. Satan wants Christ-followers to deny Christ and renounce the gospel. To take a case in point, Satan wagered with God concerning Job that Job's trust in God would fail (Job 1:11; 2:5). Therefore, renouncing dependence on God is Satan's wish for Christians, and persecution is his means of attack.<sup>28</sup>

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serve less as personal names than descriptions of his activity to "slander" and "accuse." Feldmeier, *The First Letter of Peter: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 247.

<sup>25</sup> Joel B. Green, *1 Peter*, The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 180-81.

<sup>26</sup> Twelftree, "Testing," 815. Twelftree argues for different intentions behind God's and Satan's testing. God's goal is Christians' success, whereas Satan desires Christians' failure.

<sup>27</sup> Green, *1 Peter*, 181. Green observes,

From a human vantage point, the agenda might appear to be the shaming and maltreatment of those who fail to live up to the standards set by respectable Roman society; this is bad enough, but those aims are frighteningly overshadowed by the active presence of an even darker intent. From a diabolical perspective, the agenda is to provoke defection from the faith, apostasy. Far more is at stake than social standing.

<sup>28</sup> Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 219. Deception is the other way Satan leads

As a result, when suffering strikes, there is eternal danger. Hell is filled with people who abandoned Christ under trial (2 Tim 2:12).<sup>29</sup> From a human perspective, renouncing Christ is the greatest threat that persecution brings to Christians' lives, even as from God's perspective, all genuine believers persevere (1 John 2:19). Consequently when persecution strikes, Christ-followers should respond by doubling down on their commitment to Christ and remain "firm [with respect to] your faith" (5:9).<sup>30</sup> Christians respond to persecution by committing even more to Jesus Christ and his promises. If the temptation is to turn away from Jesus amidst suffering, Christians must renew their commitment to him even more. After all, Jesus resisted Satan and was victorious over Satan on the cross (3:18-22). Further, because of Christ's work, Christians can withstand Satan's attacks and remain faithful to God.<sup>31</sup>

In encouraging Christian believers to double down on their commitment to Jesus, Peter also reminds them that they do not face persecution alone. Christians suffer in solidarity with Christ, and they also suffer in solidarity with other believers worldwide (5:9). Satan attacks the entire Christian community living between Jesus's first and second advents. Therefore, hundreds and thousands of other Christians face similar threats. Knowing Christians do not suffer alone encourages Christians to endure another day.

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people astray. Beale identifies Satan's deception of Adam in the garden as "typologically reproduced" from the beginning of salvation history to the end of salvation history (cf. 1 John 2:26; Matt 24:12).

<sup>29</sup> It is important to note that genuine Christians may temporarily have lapses in faith that fall short of apostasy. As an illustration, Jesus prayed that Peter's "faith may not fail" (Luke 22:31-32). However, though Peter's faith initially faltered under trial, it returned and endured. In sum, apostasy is a settled and lasting rejection of Jesus and the gospel.

<sup>30</sup> Elliott, *1 Peter*, 860. Elliott understands "in" as a dative of respect: "Firm *with respect to* your faith." Emphasis original.

<sup>31</sup> Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 218. Beale observes a difference in the success of Satan's testing after Jesus. "The last Adam, Jesus, and his true followers succeed in contrast to the first Adam, who failed and was deceived by the devil."



## **Application**

One of the upsides of living in the West is that many Christians and churches like Valley Baptist Church do not experience persecution. However, while Christian believers in the West are in the enviable position of avoiding persecution, at the same time, they miss out on persecution's joys. They also sometimes fail to develop the mature praise, trust, acceptance, and commitment to Jesus Christ that persecution demands.

The biblical response to persecution expected by Peter is remarkable and enviable. Most churches desire to see mature faith and commitment to Jesus expressed by their members. For instance, churches in the West spend millions of dollars annually pursuing maturity but with mixed results. Perhaps the immaturity in commitment to Jesus observed in many Western Christians and churches cannot be remedied by larger budgets. As Peter demonstrates, Christianity thrives under threat, and God meant Christian discipleship for a challenging chapter of redemptive history. Hence, without persecution, Christian discipleship might face challenges in attaining full maturity compared to its growth in the presence of persecution.

As the early church continues to be a model and inspiration for churches today, churches like Valley Baptist Church must appreciate how suffering was an inseparable part of the early church's vitality and success. As a result, the enviable position is not Christians who somehow avoid persecution but Christians who experience suffering as Peter expects.

## **Conclusion**

On Dec 7, 1941, the Japanese military unexpectedly attacked the U.S. Pacific Fleet anchored at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The attack caused the loss of thousands of American lives and extensive damage to the Pacific Fleet. Given Japan's military aspirations and the strategic value of the U.S. Pacific Fleet to prevent the Japanese from reaching their goals, the preparation and readiness of the Americans at the time of the

attack fell woefully short.<sup>32</sup> As Christians examine their lives and churches, their preparedness must match the chapter of redemptive history in which they live. Since Christ-followers live in a chapter of redemptive history characterized by persecution, they must hear Peter's warnings and prepare. Christians and churches who prepare themselves ahead of time will respond in the way God desires and remain committed to the mission God has given them.

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<sup>32</sup> Gordon W. Prange, Donald M. Goldstein, and Katherine V. Dillon, *At Dawn We Slept: The Untold Story of Pearl Harbor* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991).

## CHAPTER 9

### PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Never does a pastor have years to work on a sermon. Often, a pastor outlines, writes, preaches, and files away a sermon within days. Having the time to outline an entire sermon series, write and preach early drafts, and revise and finalize the sermons as presented here is a rare opportunity. After all, pastors do not have the luxury of reading the Bible verbatim to their congregations. They must take the additional step of organizing, explaining, applying, and illustrating Scripture to their listeners. Amazingly, in God's plan, the resulting sermon remains just as much God's Word as ever (1 Thess 2:13). As a result, speaking God's Word to Valley Baptist Church and having the extra time through this project to do so as clearly and accurately as possible was a privilege. Working on this project challenged me theologically, showed me how much I have to learn, proved the value of biblical-theological reflection in sermon preparation, and blessed Valley Baptist Church.

I stated in the introductory chapter that my project's goal was theological rather than homiletical: to identify the theological connections 1 Peter makes with the rest of Scripture and God's redemptive plan and incorporate them into my sermons. As I worked on the project, I found that my understanding of Peter's biblical-theological themes was either lacking or underdeveloped. For example, Peter used an Old Testament framework of the temple to teach Christians about their identity as God's dwelling place (1 Pet 2:4-10). As I studied the Bible's temple theology and its development in 1 Peter, I began to grasp Peter's argument. As a result, I made a much more powerful argument to Valley Baptist Church than if I had not considered the temple theme from the standpoint of redemptive history. Completing this project allowed me to address gaps like these in

my theological understanding. It brought confidence to my handling of important biblical-theological themes developed throughout the Bible, such as inheritance, exodus, Israel/people of God, mission, servant/service, pastor/shepherd, testing/persecution, and many others. Furthermore, in my sermons, I had an opportunity to practice incorporating biblical-theological themes without allowing them to overwhelm the passage's main idea or become the sermon's goal.

Of course, as redemptive history's climax and goal, Jesus Christ is the Bible's most important theme and fulfills all the abovementioned themes. Peter's use of biblical-theological themes to explain Christ transformed my understanding of Christ and the themes themselves. As an illustration, because Jesus is God who dwells in human flesh, his incarnation fundamentally transforms the OT understanding of the temple as God's dwelling place (John 2:21). Consequently, preaching the idea from 1 Peter that Christian believers are God's dwelling place in fulfillment of the OT temple promises cannot be understood apart from Jesus and union with him (1 Pet 2:4-10). I am confident that the theological development I experienced because of this project will further my ability to understand and faithfully preach Christ and the Bible in the future.

In addition to aiding my theological development, this project also involved identifying important theological works on 1 Peter and incorporating and interacting with them in my prepared sermons. Most sermons are not the exclusive work of a pastor. They result from the influence of many "conversation partners," such as books and commentaries.<sup>1</sup> Because of the theological gaps mentioned above, I benefited from reading the research and writing of others on the text and theology of 1 Peter and the discipline of biblical theology. In the sermon footnotes, I preserved many authors' insights to show how their insights shaped my sermons. Though too many to mention,

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<sup>1</sup> I do not remember where I first encountered the concept that commentaries serve as conversation partners.

favorite conversation partners included Goppelt's and Elliot's 1 Peter commentaries, monographs on temple and mission by Beale and Wright, and Green's observation that subordination and service further rather than hinder God's redemptive plans.<sup>2</sup> Because of the substantial research this project afforded, the sermons presented here resulted from even more conversation partners than usual. They pushed the quality of my work to new heights. In addition, they revealed my limitations and weaknesses in interpreting the Bible. Thus, any shortcomings or oversights reflected in the sermons remain my own.

As important as books and commentaries are for sermon preparation, 1 Peter taught me that Scripture is the most important conversation partner for preaching. Working through 1 Peter's many citations and allusions from the OT challenged my understanding of the OT and confirmed what I already knew: that I need to grow in my understanding of the OT. This project deepened my conviction of the OT's relevance for preaching and furthered my commitment to OT preaching and study.

I knew before undertaking this project that biblical-theological reflection was important for preaching. Biblical-theological reflection involves a wider lens for interpreting a text: looking beyond a passage's textual horizon to its epochal and canonical horizons. In sermon preparation, biblical-theological reflection is easy to skip because of limited time. In sum, this project aimed to demonstrate the value of biblical-theological reflection for preaching and to grow in its practice. I was not disappointed. For instance, Peter only mentions evangelism in a few places (1 Pet 2:9; 3:1, 15). Hence, 1 Peter is not the first book that comes to mind with evangelistic or missional themes. However, as I demonstrate throughout the project, evangelism and mission are significant themes in 1 Peter.

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<sup>2</sup> Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter*, ed. Ferdinand Hahn, trans. John E. Alsup (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); John H. Elliott, *1 Peter*, The Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 37B (New York: Doubleday, 2000); Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006); Joel B. Green, *1 Peter*, The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

Nevertheless, as I outlined the sermon series at the beginning of the project, read commentaries, identified key themes, and prepared sermon drafts, Peter's missional theme was not apparent at first. Only after additional biblical-theological reflection on the missional purposes of the temple, Israel, Isaiah's suffering servant, and Jesus's suffering did I realize Peter used these themes to urge Christ-followers to endure suffering for missional reasons. First Peter's missional emphasis that emerged through biblical-theological reflection became a central theme of my sermons and transformed my presentation of persecution to Valley Baptist Church. Because of this project, I have a new appreciation for biblical-theological reflection. The insights I gained from biblical-theological reflection on the text of 1 Peter motivate me to continue reading Scripture with a wider lens.

Finally, while this project was a blessing to me, it was also a blessing to Valley Baptist Church. Only God knows the true impact of my sermons. A formal evaluation of the sermons' effect on listeners was beyond the project's scope.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, as an associate pastor who preaches intermittently throughout the year, I did not preach the sermons on consecutive Sundays; I preached them on select Sundays over eighteen months. I would have preferred preaching the sermons on successive Sundays, which may have resulted in better informal feedback. After all, one of my desires for the sermon series was for church members to grow in their appreciation and understanding of persecution. However, preaching intermittently, I am unaware of how much church members could retain from sermon to sermon, making a thorough understanding of Christian persecution much more difficult.

If I had to choose one piece of feedback from listeners to share, it was a comment by a member of Valley Baptist who said that she appreciated how I spoke of the garden of Eden as a sanctuary to explain God's people as a temple sanctuary from 1 Peter

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 1 for a tool to evaluate a sermon from the standpoint of biblical theology.

2:4-10. While her comment on the surface focused on one specific connection I was making between the OT and the New Testament, she identified, without knowing it, my methodology for the project and preaching: that we understand the Bible by using a wider lens. Though the church member may be unable to verbalize a biblical-theological interpretation method, she did recognize what was happening and was blessed by it. Her comment and this project convinced me that the more Valley Baptist Church hears biblical-theological sermons, the more they will “catch” the importance of reading Scripture with a broader lens and the richness and power God’s redemptive plan fulfilled in Jesus brings to every passage.

## APPENDIX 1

### BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL SERMON EVALUATION TOOL

Evaluating my sermons was beyond the project's scope. However, I created a biblical-theological sermon evaluation tool for evaluating my sermons in the future. The tool utilizes Richard Lint's epochal, covenantal, and canonical horizons to evaluate sermons from a biblical-theological standpoint. The tool could serve as a basis to assess sermons when preparing a sermon or as part of a sermon evaluation.



**Sermon Title/Text:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Name of Evaluator:** \_\_\_\_\_

Instructions: Rate each area, marking an X in the box that most accurately reflects your assessment of how the sermon meets the listed standard.

<b>Biblical-Theological Sermon Evaluation Tool</b>				
<b>1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary</b>				
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The sermon utilizes the context of the Bible's human authors.</b>	The sermon does not consider the human author's historical or literary context.	The sermon utilizes the human author's historical and literary context, but the overall message and organization remain unaffected.	The human author's historical and literary context affects the overall message and organization, but the utilization is either understated or overstated in the sermon.	The human author's historical and literary context affects the overall message, and the utilization is presented effectively in the sermon.
<b>The sermon is aware of the continuity and discontinuity between the Bible's Testaments and covenants.</b>	The sermon is unaware of the sermon passage's Testament or applicable covenant(s).	The sermon is aware of the sermon passage's Testament and applicable covenant(s), but the overall message remains unaffected.	The Testament and covenant(s) applicable to the sermon passage affects the overall message, but the awareness is either understated or overstated in the sermon.	The Testament and covenant(s) applicable to the sermon passage affects the overall message, and the awareness is presented effectively in the sermon.
<b>The sermon perceives the storyline of the whole Bible.</b>	The sermon shows no perception of the sermon passage's advancement or fulfillment in earlier or later events, promises, or themes in the biblical story.	The sermon perceives the sermon passage's advancement or fulfillment in earlier or later events, promises, and themes in the biblical story, but the overall message remains unaffected.	The advancement or fulfillment of the sermon passage in earlier or later events, promises, and themes in the biblical story affects the overall message, but the perception is either understated or overstated in the sermon.	The advancement or fulfillment of the sermon passage in earlier or later events, promises, and themes in the biblical story affects the overall message, and the perception is presented effectively in the sermon.
<b>The sermon makes connections to Jesus's person and work.</b>	The sermon shows no interest in connecting the sermon passage to Jesus's person and work.	The sermon connects the sermon passage to Jesus's person and work, but the overall message remains unaffected.	Jesus's person and work affect the overall message, but the connection is either understated or overstated in the sermon.	Jesus's person and work affect the overall message, and the connection to Jesus is presented effectively in the sermon.

Comments:

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## ABSTRACT

### BETWEEN THE TIMES: PREACHING 1 PETER TO VALLEY BAPTIST CHURCH IN APPLETON, WISCONSIN

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023  
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This project aimed to explore and practice how biblical theology and biblical-theological methods inform the preaching of 1 Peter to Valley Baptist Church in Appleton, Wisconsin. Chapter 1, an introductory chapter, defines biblical theology and demonstrates how biblical-theological methods answer critical questions about 1 Peter for preaching. Chapters 2-8 are a seven-part exposition of 1 Peter for Valley Baptist Church. The sermons encourage Christians to endure persecution and advance God's redemptive mission by drawing on Jesus's suffering and Israel's identity and mission in the Old Testament. A concluding chapter offers personal reflections on preparing and preaching the sermons.

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