

**ASSIGNMENT FIVE:**  
**AN EXEGETICAL PAPER ON**  
**1 PETER 4:12-19**  
(Unabridged Version)

BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION (BIBL 0501)  
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## **Introduction**

The biblical passage to be interpreted in this paper is 1 Peter 4:12-19. This text has been given titles such as “The First Epistle of Peter” (NASB) or “The First Letter of Peter” (ESV), but most Bible translations refer to the text plainly as 1 Peter. The earliest Greek manuscripts bear the austere title of *First Peter*,<sup>1</sup> and so shall it be in this study.

In the interest of engaging in a valiant study, the King James Bible will be the reading I draw upon and shall form the basis of this exegesis on that translation. This is because the KJB (and NKJV) contains a fuller translation of verse 14 than any of the other versions, meriting an examination of the supporting textual witnesses for that particular rendition.

## **Authorship**

*First Peter* opens with immediate indication of authorship, as it begins by identifying the writer as, “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ” (1:1a). The author will then later remind the audience of his apostolicity, calling himself a “witness of the sufferings of Christ” (5:1).

Initially known as “Simon” or “Simeon” (Mark 1:16; John 1:40-41), Peter was the son of Jonas (Matt 16:17) from Bethsaida. His brother, Andrew, introduced him to Jesus Christ (John 1:40-42). Jesus eventually dubbed him “Cephas” (Matt 16:18; John 1:42), which is the Aramaic word for rock, transliterated as “Petrus” in Greek and “Peter” in English. He was married (Mark 1:30) and was among the first disciples of Jesus Christ (Mark 1:16-17; John 1:35-42). Peter eventually became an apostle of Christ (Matt 10:2; Mark 3:14-16) and is mentioned prominently throughout the four Gospels and the Book of Acts, and his name appears in the Paul’s letter to Galatians.

Peter became a leading apostle after Jesus’ resurrection and ascension and gave his first known public sermon on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-36), followed by several other rousing sermons and acts of miracles in the name of Christ. He served to bring God’s Word to the Gentiles (Acts 10:44-48), but drew the ire of political leaders for his bold proclamations and preaching of the risen Christ. He had been arrested by the authorities for his evangelical deeds (Acts 4:1-3; 5:17-18), at one point by order of King Herod (Acts 12:3-4). Peter was ultimately martyred by upside-down crucifixion in Rome under the reign of Emperor Nero, as attested to in the conclusion of the apocryphal *Acts of Peter* and also in Tertullian’s *Prescription Against Heretics* (chapter 36).

An inductive study of Peter’s epistles and other NT texts provides some solid internal biblical evidence to support the apostolic authorship of *First Peter*. The apostle himself writes in 2 Peter 3:1 that it is his second epistle, and thereby acknowledges the existence of a first. The Book of Acts, written by the meticulous historian Luke, records a number of Peter’s sermons and public proclamations and the similarities between Peter’s

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<sup>1</sup> Kistemaker, Simon J.; *New Testament Commentary : Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and of the Epistle of Jude* (Grand Rapids : Baker Academic, 1987), p. 5

preaching there and his writings in First Peter are remarkable.<sup>2</sup> For example, Peter preached of Christ as the rejected stone (alluding to Psalm 118:22) in Acts 4:11 and he wrote about this same thing in 1 Peter 2:7. He spoke about God not being a respecter of persons in Acts 10:34 and wrote the same thing of God the Father in 1 Peter 1:17. He preached of Jesus' ordination by God to be Judge of the quick and dead in Acts 10:42, also wrote about "[giving] account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead" in 1 Peter 4:5. Luke recorded in Acts 5 that Peter was among the apostles (prior to Paul's apostleship) who rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for Christ's name (vv. 40-41), and then Peter himself writes "if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf" in 1 Peter 4:16.

There is a fair amount of external textual evidence to support that the early Church recognized *First Peter* as a genuine apostolic writing. Clement of Rome wrote to the church in Corinth in the latter part of the first century (c. 95 A.D.) using words and terminology which paralleled that found within *First Peter*<sup>3</sup>, and he attested to Peter's martyrdom for the cause of Christ's Church.<sup>4</sup> Polycarp wrote a letter to the church in Philippi in the first part of the second century, clearly borrowing from 1 Peter 1:8 when he opened up with the familiar words, "[Jesus Christ] in whom, though you did not see him, you believed in unspeakable and glorified joy."<sup>5</sup> Notable figures in history such as Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Papias (a bishop in Asia Minor c. 125 A.D.) are also known to have quoted from Peter's epistle.<sup>6</sup>

There are some critical objections to Peter the apostle being the author of this letter, with the strongest ones made on the basis of the classical Greek writing of this letter. Critics speculate that Peter's reputation as an "unlearned and ignorant" man (Acts 4:13) preclude him from being able to communicate in highly developed Greek writing, and that Aramaic would have been his native tongue.<sup>7</sup> Also, the OT quotes found in *First Peter* are taken from the Greek Septuagint, rather than the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>8</sup>

The general view is that it is not unreasonable to assume that Peter was familiar with Greek language, considering that as a Galilean fisherman living and working in the trade route of Capernaum, he would have likely spoken Greek to conduct his business. His brother's name, Andrew, is believed to be of Greek origin (*Andreas*), and suggests that his family had accepted a Greek influence in their home.<sup>9</sup> Peter also spent about 30 years

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<sup>2</sup> Kistemaker, Simon J., *New Testament Commentary : Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and of the Epistle of Jude* (Grand Rapids : Baker Academic, 1987), pp. 6-7

<sup>3</sup> First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, salutation

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter 5

<sup>5</sup> Polycarp's Epistle to the Philippians, 1:3

<sup>6</sup> Kistemaker, Simon J., *New Testament Commentary : Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and of the Epistle of Jude* (Grand Rapids : Baker Academic, 1987), p. 6

<sup>7</sup> MacArthur, John; *The MacArthur Study Bible : New American Standard Bible* (Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), S. 1 Pet 1

<sup>8</sup> Carson, D. A.: *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition*. (4th ed. Leicester, England; Downers Grove : Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), S. 1 Pet

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

in public ministry among many Gentiles, and this would have required communicating in the Greek language, along with making references to the Septuagint (LXX) Bible version.

The author of *First Peter* told us in the conclusion of his letter that he acquired assistance in preparing his work by “Silvanus” (1 Peter 5:12). The name Silvanus is believed to have been contracted into Silas.<sup>10</sup> Luke recorded that apostolic letters were sent to the Gentiles by the work of “Barsabbus, and Silas, chief men among the brethren” and that the apostles “wrote letters by them after this manner” (Acts 15:22-23). We know that dictation to a scribe had been practiced in other instances, such as by Tertius writing for Paul (Rom 16:22). Therefore, it is not unreasonable to assume that Silvanus (Silas) was chosen to assist with Peter’s epistle for good reason. Known as a prophet (Acts 15:32), Silas could have assisted with composition of the Greek language, precisely putting the Spirit-inspired words of Peter onto papyrus while under the apostle’s supervision.

Another doubt to Peter’s authentic authorship stems from similarities found between Peter and Paul’s letters. A comparable theme is found between *First Peter* (3:1-7) and *Ephesians* (5:22-26), and some of Peter’s words and phrases are similar to those of Paul’s in *Romans* and *Hebrews*. Peter and Paul apparently knew each other (Acts 9:26-27; Gal 1:18; 2:7-9) and it is clear that Peter was well aware of Paul’s teachings and his epistles (2 Peter 3:15-16). According to D.A. Carson, “It could be said that the writers of all three ‘breathed the same spiritual atmosphere.’”<sup>11</sup>

The arguments against Peter’s authorship of *First Peter* are, at best, speculative and inconclusive. The bulk of the evidence clearly supports the widely accepted belief that the apostle Peter prepared and authorized this epistle.

## Date

The history of the Church typically accepts that Peter ministered and was martyred in Rome, and this is supported by Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History* (2:15:2; 2.25.8; and 3.1.2–3) and Tertullian’s *Prescription Against Heretics* (chapter 36).

Peter offers closing salutations from “the church that is at Babylon” (5:13), but this is widely accepted as being a thinly-veiled reference to Rome, the throne room of the dominating Roman Empire. Although the Mesopotamian city of Babylon was no longer a significant power during the first century<sup>12</sup>, the name of the city would have been recognized, historically and metaphorically, as being synonymous with a place of fear, exile, and pagan oppression.

<sup>10</sup> Strong, James; *The New Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible : Greek Dictionary of the New Testament* (Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), S. G4610

<sup>11</sup> Carson, D. A.: *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition*. (4th ed. Leicester, England; Downers Grove : Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), S. 1 Pet

<sup>12</sup> Radmacher, Earl D.; Allen, Ronald Barclay ; House, H. Wayne: *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Commentary*. (Nashville : T. Nelson Publishers, 1999) S. 1 Pet

*First Peter* makes no reference to the formal court prosecutions associated with Emperor Trajan in the early second century,<sup>13</sup> and most biblical commentators seem to agree that *First Peter* would have been written during the reign of Emperor Nero (54-68 A.D.), a notoriously cruel man who harshly victimized Christians.

It has been said that Peter's call to submit and honour the king (2:13, 17) seems unlikely to have been made during the persecution of Christians after the Roman fire of 64 A.D.<sup>14</sup> This opinion is not shared by the writer of this report, who takes the view that an apostle of Jesus Christ would be all the more likely to exhort such humble and faithful behaviour during times of evil and darkness. Peter would have learned from Jesus' great example of humble submission to Rome's oppressive authority, carried out in faithfulness to God. Peter may have recalled Jesus' statement to Pontius Pilate at His trial, "Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above" (John 19:11).

The meaning of the words "fiery trial" (1:1) used by Peter might take on even greater depth if they were to be applied within the historical context of Rome's burning and the persecution of Christians which followed it. It is widely regarded that this epistle was written prior to the Roman fire of 64 A.D., but this writer seriously considers the possibility that Peter wrote the letter during the very time of crisis in Rome.

The internal evidence within the text of *First Peter* supports that the author is addressing first-generation believers, as "there is no hint of second-generation Christianity"<sup>15</sup> found within the writing. This further supports a view that *First Peter* was composed during the time of Emperor Nero, since he reigned during the time of first-generation Christians.

Based on the available evidence and the learned opinions of biblical scholars, it seems likely that *First Peter* was written c. 62 – 64 A.D.

## Unity

The themes of *First Peter* are consistent, the writing style is constant, the flow of the epistle's message allows for the gradual increase in urgency, and the overall consistency in the substance and delivery attest to the letter's unity. As Peter himself wrote in an apparent postscript, this epistle was his testimony and exhortation to Christians to stand firm in the true grace of God (1 Pet 5:12).

Some scholars have segmented *First Peter* into two parts, with a dividing line placed between 4:6 and 4:7 because the first half of the epistle does not suggest the onset of any

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<sup>13</sup> Keener, Craig S. ; *The IVP Bible Background Commentary : New Testament* (Downers Grove : InterVarsity Press, 1993), S. 1 Pet

<sup>14</sup> Kistemaker, Simon J., *New Testament Commentary : Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and of the Epistle of Jude* (Grand Rapids : Baker Academic, 1987), p. 19

<sup>15</sup> Kelly, J.N.D., *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude*, Thornapple Commentaries series (1969; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), p. 30

great persecution, but the second portion is more specific in its reference to suffering.<sup>16</sup> Others have considered a line drawn between 4:11 and 4:12.<sup>17</sup> While this writer does not agree with any division at all, the second theory is more reasonable.

First Peter 4:11 concludes with the words, “Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.” This form is seen again in the conclusion of the epistle (5:11), where Peter says, “To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.” The letter ends with the words, “Peace be with you all that are in Christ Jesus. Amen.” (5:14) This writing style seems to suggest that the author punctuates, if not concludes, segments of his writings with short declarations of faithful praise followed by an *Amen*. That being said, the doxology of 4:11 is not necessarily a conclusion. The NT has other examples where an apostle rejoiced in the truths of the Lord in the midst of his work and poured out similar praise in his writings (Rom. 11:33–36; 15:33 and Eph. 3:20–21).<sup>18</sup>

Although there is a marked shift in the focus on suffering by “fiery trial” in 1 Peter 4:12, this theme was first introduced by Peter in chapter one when he wrote of Christians being “in heaviness through manifold temptations” and spoke of “the trial of your faith” being compared to a purification of gold “tried with fire” (1: 7). While there are differences in tone between the two presumed sections, there is no reason believe this was unintended and we cannot assume that two letters were joined to create one epistle.

### **Original Audience**

*First Peter* opens with an address “to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1:1). Peter’s selection of words and references suggests that he was addressing a mixed group of believers comprised of Jews and Gentiles. He referred to the OT several times in his first epistle and referred to his audience as scattered strangers (1:1), which would have been most meaningful to a Jewish audience. Peter also says things which would be distinctly pertinent to a Gentile reader, such as “Which in time past [ye] were not a people, but are now the people of God” (2:10).<sup>19</sup>

Bithynia and Pontus formed a Roman province in north/northwest Asia along the southern coast of the Black Sea.<sup>20</sup> It was a prominent location during the Hellenistic age and developed a strong Greek culture.<sup>21</sup> We know that the apostle Paul once had it in mind to go to Bithynia, but the Holy Spirit “suffered it not” (Acts 16:7). It is apparent

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<sup>16</sup> Keener, Craig S. ; *The IVP Bible Background Commentary : New Testament* (Downers Grove : InterVarsity Press, 1993), S. 1 Pet

<sup>17</sup> Kistemaker, Simon J., *New Testament Commentary : Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and of the Epistle of Jude* (Grand Rapids : Baker Academic, 1987), p. 24

<sup>18</sup> Carson, D. A.: *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition*. (4th ed. Leicester, England; Downers Grove : Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), S. 1 Pet

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Beitzel, Barry J.: *Biblica: The Bible Atlas: A Social and Historical Journey Through the Lands of the Bible* (Hauppauge, NY : Barron’s, 2007) p. 455

<sup>21</sup> Radmacher, Earl D. ; Allen, Ronald Barclay ; House, H. Wayne: *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville : T. Nelson Publishers, 1999), S. 1 Pet

that, despite this, the Word of God still made its way into the region and we know this based on Peter's opening address (1:1) and because of Luke's account of Jews and proselytes from the lands of "Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia" (Acts 2:5-10).

An audience in this land might consist primarily of Jewish followers of Jesus, but taking into account the mixed population in Asia Minor, it is reasonable to infer that the letter was meant for both Jewish and Gentile Christians of a common church in the area.

### **Genre and Structure**

*First Peter* is a general epistle adhering to a set pattern and has a typical structure. It opens with the name of the writer and recipients (1:1), followed with a greeting, "Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied" (1:2) and a prayer, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:3). The body of the letter outlines the reasons for the writing (an appeal for a holy life, Christian submission, Christ's example, marriage roles, Christian conduct, Christian suffering) and concludes with a final greeting, "The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son. Greet ye one another with a kiss of charity. Peace be with you all that are in Christ Jesus. Amen." (5:13-14)

### **Historical Context**

Within the early first century A.D. there were more Jewish people living in communities abroad of the Holy Land than there were residing within the borders of Palestine. Even though Jerusalem was still considered to be the cultural and spiritual centre of the Jewish world, the Jews were scattered as far and as wide as Alexandria, Egypt, Asia Minor (now Turkey), Greece, Parthia (now Persia), and even Rome.<sup>22</sup>

While Jews were commonly disdained by most Romans, Judaism was well-represented in the empire and even popular in some areas of the world; it is even believed that Nero's own mistress, Poppaea Sabina, was a lady patron of Jewish causes.<sup>23</sup> Christianity, however, was viewed in a much more negative light and was seen as an overzealous and rebellious new sect of Judaism which enjoyed almost no support from Jewish leaders. Romans generally considered Christians as antisocial, and even labeled them as atheistic (rejecting Roman gods), cannibalistic (eating Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood), and incestuous (for saying things like "I love you, brother," or "I love you, sister"),<sup>24</sup> and they were openly ridiculed for fanatically following the teachings of a man who had been crucified as a criminal over thirty years earlier.

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<sup>22</sup> Beitzel, Barry J.: *Biblica: The Bible Atlas: A Social and Historical Journey Through the Lands of the Bible* (Hauppauge, NY : Barron's, 2007) p. 457

<sup>23</sup> Keener, Craig S. ; *The IVP Bible Background Commentary : New Testament*. (Downers Grove, Ill. : InterVarsity Press, 1993) S. 1 Pet

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

The city of Rome suffered a major fire in 64 A.D. in which two-thirds of Rome was burned down. It is noteworthy that the estates of Emperor Nero and his friend, Tigellinus, were untouched by the fire.<sup>25</sup> Their good fortune was viewed as suspicious because Nero had wanted to rebuild and expand Rome according to his own vision and designs, but in order to do this he would have to demolish parts of the city. Nero's plans were opposed by a populace who cherished their existing city, along with the culturally and historically pertinent structures within it (temples, shrines, idols, etc.).<sup>26</sup> Many Romans died during the great fire and others were left destitute and desperate. Nero, facing a civil uprising, shrewdly redirected the anger of the populace through a conspiratorial campaign of blaming the arson on an already disliked and marginalized group of people in the city, the Christians of Rome.

The second-century historian, Tacitus, recorded a number of atrocities committed against Christians during Nero's reign. It is said that Nero caused Christians to be covered in pitch and burned alive, used as human torches to illuminate his estate at night, and that he fed them to wild beasts as entertainment in public arenas.<sup>27</sup> He is thought to be responsible for the killing of thousands of Christians, and he had come to be viewed by many of their brethren as a representation of antichrist.<sup>28</sup>

Early external evidence of the victimization of Christian by Roman authorities originates from Bithynia in the form of letters written by Pliny the Younger to the emperor Trajan. Pliny governed Bithynia in 111-113 A.D. Pliny asked the emperor for advice about limits in interrogating or punishing Christians, and he wondered whether there ought to be clemency granted to children, or a if pardons should be given to those who repent of Christ, or whether or not a confessed Christian should even be allowed to recant. He described his method of dealing with Christians:

“I interrogated them whether they were Christians; if they confessed it I repeated the question twice again, adding the threat of capital punishment; if they still persevered, I ordered them to be executed. For whatever the nature of their creed might be, I could at least feel no doubt that contumacy and inflexible obstinacy deserved chastisement. There were others also possessed with the same infatuation, but being citizens of Rome, I directed them to be carried thither.”<sup>29</sup>

Pliny dealt with people who denied accusations of being Christians, along with those who were even suspected of being former Christians, by having them repeat an invocation to the Roman gods, and to the image of the emperor, and by cursing the name of Christ.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Keener, Craig S. ; *The IVP Bible Background Commentary : New Testament*. (Downers Grove, Ill. : InterVarsity Press, 1993) S. 1 Pet

<sup>26</sup> MacArthur, John; *The MacArthur Study Bible : New American Standard Bible* (Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), S. 1 Pet

<sup>27</sup> Keener, Craig S. ; *The IVP Bible Background Commentary : New Testament*. (Downers Grove, Ill. : InterVarsity Press, 1993) S. 1 Pet

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Pliny the Younger; Letters, 10.96

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.



Pliny apparently ran into some ethical difficulties after interrogating some Christians and had turned to the emperor for some advice. Pliny questioned the legality of persecuting Christians when he found that they were, in essence, peaceful and law-abiding people, guilty of nothing more than their beliefs. Nevertheless, he doubted their innocence and pressed on with his cruel inquisitions:

“I judged it so much the more necessary to extract the real truth, with the assistance of torture, from two female slaves, who were styled deaconesses: but I could discover nothing more than depraved and excessive superstition.”<sup>31</sup>

Pliny went on to express his concern about the numbers of Christians and was worried because their “contagious superstition is not confined to the cities only, but has spread through the villages and rural districts.” Likening Christianity to a spreading disease, he then stated that “it seems possible... to check and cure it” and that “it is easy to imagine what multitudes may be reclaimed from this error, if a door be left open to repentance.”<sup>32</sup>

Emperor Trajan, a legal-minded man and an advocate of due process, replied by saying that Christians were to be punished according to their violation of any established Roman laws, but added that they ought not to be actively hunted. He stated in his decree:

“The method you have pursued, my dear Pliny, in sifting the cases of those denounced to you as Christians is extremely proper. It is not possible to lay down any general rule which can be applied as the fixed standard in all cases of this nature. No search should be made for these people; when they are denounced and found guilty they must be punished; with the restriction, however, that when the party denies himself to be a Christian, and shall give proof that he is not (that is, by adoring our gods) he shall be pardoned on the ground of repentance, even though he may have formerly incurred suspicion. Informations without the accuser's name subscribed must not be admitted in evidence against anyone, as it is introducing a very dangerous precedent, and by no means agreeable to the spirit of the age.”<sup>33</sup>

### **Literary Context**

The themes found within this passage correspond well with other portions of the epistle. The topic of suffering for Christ’s sake is addressed in both 2:21 and 4:13, while undeserved Christian suffering is dealt with in verses 3:17 and 4:16, and the matter of “the end of all things” is mentioned in 4:7 and 4:17.

*First Peter* matches well with the content of the text found within the *Book of Acts*, and a few examples of this were mentioned earlier in this paper (see *Authorship*, p. 2). Both

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<sup>31</sup> Pliny the Younger; Letters, 10.96

<sup>32</sup> Pliny the Younger; Letters, 10.97

<sup>33</sup> Radmacher, Earl D. ; Allen, Ronald Barclay ; House, H. Wayne: *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville : T. Nelson Publishers, 1999), S. 1 Pet

works feature prominent similarities and attest to Peter's mindset and theology.<sup>34</sup> *First Peter* also shares parallels with the epistle of James,<sup>35</sup> particularly in their topics of trials and submission. As stated earlier, there is also a likeness found between the content of *First Peter* and that found within some of Paul's writings (see *Authorship*, p. 3). Whether one borrowed from another is a matter of speculation, opinion, and faith. The simple fact remains that the teachings are consistent and point toward a shared source (or Source) of information.

Peter was obviously conversant with the OT Scriptures and he supported his exhortations by drawing from them regularly, alluding to Exodus (1x), Leviticus (1x), Isaiah (6x), the Psalms (2x) and Proverbs (2x),<sup>36</sup> with a direct quote from Proverbs 11:31 (LXX) found in 4:18 of his letter. It is interesting to note that *First Peter* contains proportionately more OT content and references than any other NT epistle.<sup>37</sup>

### **Main Principles, Themes and Theological Message**

The overall message and purpose of *First Peter* seems clearly summed up in the author's postscript-style conclusion, where he briefly explains his desire to encourage his audience with a message of hope amidst suffering, while testifying to God's amazing grace (5:12). However, for the purpose of an exegetical study on 4:12-19, our examination shall remain in that passage.

The passage of 1 Peter 4:12-19 contains four principles. **Expect suffering** (v. 12). **Rejoice in suffering** (vv. 13-14). **Consider why you are suffering** (vv. 15-18). **Commit your life to God** (v. 19).

A Jewish audience of Christ followers would be well-familiar with suffering, as the Jews have long endured disdain and persecution throughout the history of the world. Jewish converts new to Christianity would have even endured recent hardship from their own people, as the majority of Jewish society rejected and ridiculed Christians for their faith in the recently-crucified Jesus as Messiah. The Gentiles, however, would not be nearly as familiar with, or prepared for, suffering persecution as a religious community. Peter addresses this when he says, **“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you. But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.”** (4:12-13)

<sup>34</sup> Compare the texts: *Acts* 2:23/*1 Pet.* 1:20; *Acts* 2:31/*1 Pet.* 1:11; *Acts* 2:34–35/*1 Pet.* 3:22; *Acts* 4:11/*1 Pet.* 2:7; *Acts* 4:12/*1 Pet.* 3:21; *Acts* 5:41/*1 Pet.* 4:16; *Acts* 10:34/*1 Pet.* 1:17; *Acts* 10:39/*1 Pet.* 2:24.

<sup>35</sup> Compare the texts: *1 Pet.* 1:1/*James* 1:1; *1 Pet.* 1:3/*James* 1:18; *1 Pet.* 1:6/*James* 1:2; *1 Peter* 1:23/*James* 1:18; *1 Pet.* 2:1/*James* 1:18; *1 Pet.* 2:11/*James* 4:1; *1 Pet.* 2:12/*James* 3:13; *1 Pet.* 5:4/*James* 1:12; *1 Pet.* 5:5-6/*James* 4:6-7.

<sup>36</sup> See *1 Peter* 1:16, 24–25; 2:6-9c, 22; 3:10–12; 5:5

<sup>37</sup> Kistemaker, Simon J., *New Testament Commentary : Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and of the Epistle of Jude* (Grand Rapids : Baker Academic, 1987), p. 22

Peter emphasized that Christians can expect hardship in their fellowship with Christ. His mention of a “fiery” trial, or “**πυρωσει**” (Gr., transliterated *purosisis*)<sup>38</sup>, conjures images of a burning or smelting process of purification. This language connects the reader to what Peter said in the first chapter, “That the **trial of your faith**, being much **more precious than of gold** that perisheth, though it be **tried with fire**, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1:7, bold added). Peter was teaching about God’s use of suffering as an instrument to test faith and for the sanctification for His people.

Peter mentioned that believers are not to be surprised about suffering “as though some strange thing happened unto you.” As he wrote this, perhaps Peter recalled the words of his Master, Jesus Christ:

“If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.” (John 15:18-19)

Peter exhorted people to view suffering as a positive thing and taught them that this was a faithful way of Christian life, perhaps alluding to another teaching of Jesus Christ:

“Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven” (Matt 5:11-12a).

Peter then continued in this fashion as he wrote, “**If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified**” (4:14).

Peter is still encouraging people to expect, even welcome, insults and unfair treatment for the privilege of representing Christ, and he says that this will be met with God’s approval and His blessing.

Closer scrutiny of this verse reveals some challenges of interpretation in a grammatical and theological sense. When Peter says that “the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you”, does he mean to communicate a separate “spirit of glory” *along with* the Spirit of God, or does he mean to emphatically speak of the “Spirit of glory” as being *identical to* the Spirit of God? There are various interpretations of this verse.

Simon J. Kistemaker notes that Peter borrowed from Isaiah 11:2, a Messianic prophecy which reads “And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him.” His interpretation is that “the phrase *spirit of glory* points to Christ (compare John 1:14). Thus, both the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of God rest upon the individual Christian.”<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Strong, James; *The New Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible : Greek Dictionary of the New Testament* (Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), S. G4451

<sup>39</sup> Kistemaker, Simon J., *New Testament Commentary : Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and of the Epistle of Jude* (Grand Rapids : Baker Academic, 1987), p. 176

D.A. Carson weighs-in on the matter by analyzing ancient manuscripts and saying that “Some have taken *the* [spirit of] *glory* (‘spirit of’ is not in the original) to refer to the *Shekinah*, the visible brightness which symbolized God’s presence among his people (Ex. 40:34–35).” He goes on to say that while this may be true, the context and format of the words render it likely to be interpreted as “[God’s] Spirit of glory as he reveals [his] glory to his people by making Christ real to them and transforming them into his image.”<sup>40</sup>

Certain 20<sup>th</sup> century Bible translators have devised alternative interpretations of 1 Pet 4:14 which differ from the majority of more widely accepted versions. For example, the Modern Language Bible (MLB) reads 1 Peter 4:14 as, “the Spirit of glory, yes, the Spirit of God, is resting on you” while the New English Bible (NEB) renders it as, “that glorious Spirit which is the Spirit of God is resting upon you.”

The Gospel of St. John speaks of the Word made flesh, dwelling among them and says “we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father” (John 1:14). The Lord Jesus Himself declared, “Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me” (John 14:11a).

Upon considering these truths and taking into account the context of suffering for Christ and the mention of His glory being revealed in *First Peter* (v. 13), it seems reasonable that Peter wrote of the unified Spirit of Christ and of God resting upon the suffering Christian.

An examination of “**on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified**” (1 Pet 4:14c), is challenging because most Bible translators have tended to avoid it, despite the support of several textual witnesses.<sup>41</sup> The sentence is not found within the two oldest Greek manuscripts, but it is found in the ancient manuscripts of the Vulgate (Sahidic, Cyprian).<sup>42</sup> Few Bible commentaries address this sentence, even though it is found in the KJV and NKJV, but Matthew Henry did interpret for his readers and his insight on this may capture the meaning of the entire verse. Henry said:

“By your patience and fortitude in suffering, by your dependence upon the promises of God, and adhering to the word which the Holy Spirit hath revealed, *he is on your part glorified*; but by the contempt and reproaches cast upon you *the Spirit itself* is evil-spoken of and blasphemed... The blasphemies and reproaches which evil men cast upon good people are taken by the Spirit of God as cast upon himself: *On their part he is evil-spoken of.*”<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Carson, D. A.: *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition*. (4th ed. Leicester, England; Downers Grove : Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), S. 1 Pet 4:12

<sup>41</sup> Kistemaker, Simon J., *New Testament Commentary : Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and of the Epistle of Jude* (Grand Rapids : Baker Academic, 1987), p. 176

<sup>42</sup> Jamieson, Robert : Faussett, A.R. : Brown, David : Jamieson-Faussett-Brown Commentary on the Whole Bible (Quickverse software version, 2009), S. 1 Pet 4:14

<sup>43</sup> Henry, Matthew: *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody : Hendrickson, 1996, c1991), S. 1 Pet 4:12

Peter develops his theme by marking the difference between vain suffering and that endured in the righteousness for the name of Jesus Christ. Peter says, **“But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.”** (1 Pet 4:15-16)

Peter seems to connect this to his earlier teachings. He had made an earlier allusion to Leviticus in 1 Pet 1:15-16 and called the people of God to be holy because God is holy. He also taught that God authorizes governors to punish evildoers (2:14). By mentioning murder and theft and other shameful acts of wrongdoing, Peter builds on his teaching and indicates that such activities justly deserve a punishment which is not counted as worthy suffering.

Peter includes the term “busybody” in his list of discreditable conduct. This word appears only once in all of Greek literature<sup>44</sup> and is uniquely found within *First Peter*. The Greek word, **ἀλλοτριεπίσκοπος** (transliterated *allogriepiskopos*), translates as “a busybody in other men’s matters” or “one who takes the supervision of affairs pertaining to others and in no wise to himself, a meddler in other men’s affairs.” This is essentially two Greek words (*allogrios* and *episkopos*) combined into one, literally and essentially translating into English as “another man’s overseer.”<sup>45</sup> The uniqueness of this word seems to suggest that Peter may have taken some Spirit-inspired liberty to express full meaning.

Peter contrasts his warning against suffering for the wrong reasons with the word *yet*. He exhorts the reader to overcome any feelings of shame which they might associated with suffering for Christ, and instead urges people to see the honour and privilege of suffering under affiliation with His glorious name.

Peter delves into the topic of God’s judgment as he writes, **“For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”** (1 Pet 4:17-18)

Peter reminds his audience that God’s family will be the first to see judgment (v. 17) and he may be recalling OT teachings of this topic (Jer 25:29, Ezek 9:6 and Mal 3:1–3).<sup>46</sup> It is interesting to note that Malachi also made reference to God’s “refiner’s fire” and said that “the Lord, whom ye seek... shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver.” This teaching may, at least in part, explain Peter’s mindset as he wrote his first epistle. Peter emphasizes the point by following-up in verse 18 with a direct quote from Proverbs 11:31 (LXX).

<sup>44</sup> Kistemaker, Simon J., *New Testament Commentary : Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and of the Epistle of Jude* (Grand Rapids : Baker Academic, 1987), p. 178

<sup>45</sup> Strong, James; *The New Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible : Greek Dictionary of the New Testament* (Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), S. G244; G245; G1985

<sup>46</sup> Carson, D. A.: *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition* (4th ed. Leicester, England; Downers Grove : Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), S. 1 Pet 4:12

The passage concludes with Peter saying, **“Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.”** (1 Peter 4:19)

The Greek word for “commit” used here is **παρατίθημι** (transliterated *paratithemi*), which can be translated into English as “to deposit; to intrust, commit to one’s charge.”<sup>47</sup> To consider this word in banking terms compliments Peter’s reference to believers’ faith being much more precious than gold refined by fire (1 Pet 1:7) and helps unify the letter. It could also remind readers of Psalm 31:5, “Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth” and might bring remembrance to Jesus’ loud cry on the cross (Luke 23:46).

Albert Barnes does well in interpreting what it means for Peter to have referred to the “faithful Creator” and said:

“As Creator... as one who has brought us, and all creatures and things into being, we may be sure that he will be “faithful” to the design which he had in view... Redeemed by the blood of His Son, and renewed by His Spirit after the image of Him who erected us, we may still go to Him as our Creator, and may pray that even yet the high and noble ends for which we were made may be accomplished in us. Doing this, we shall find Him as true to that purpose as though we had never sinned.”<sup>48</sup>

First Peter 4:12-19 highlights the perfect example of faithfulness and humility given to all of creation by the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter encourages believers to follow His example by trusting in God, obeying God’s will, living holy lives, being disciplined and honourable, and by releasing themselves from the bondage of creaturely comforts.

### **Theological Implications and Application**

One thing is certain for true followers of Christ, and that is that they are called to live radically different lives from those of unbelievers. This was true for the Israelites, and it is true for Christians, affirming the constancy of God and His covenant with His people. *First Peter* highlights that glorious dissimilarity, as believers are to rejoice in suffering like Christ, and that being criticized for being a follower of Jesus will turn out to be a blessing, and that it is an honour to endure suffering in Christ’s name (as *Christians*). This is a timeless truth for all generations of God’s people.

*First Peter* explains that a Christian can actually give testimony to an unfriendly world simply by living in obedience to God’s will. This point is well taken when you consider how even Pliny the Younger, a cruel and motivated persecutor of Christians, was unable to deny their righteous, peaceful and obedient ways of life. Pliny stated:

<sup>47</sup> Strong, James; *The New Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible : Greek Dictionary of the New Testament* (Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), S. G3908

<sup>48</sup> Barnes, Albert; *Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament* (Electronic Edition STEP Files, ©1999, Findex.Com. All rights reserved.), S. 1 Pet 4:19

“They affirmed, however, the whole of their guilt, or their error, was, that they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food but food of an ordinary and innocent kind. Even this practice, however, they had abandoned after the publication of my edict, by which, according to your orders, I had forbidden political associations.”<sup>49</sup>

While most Christians living in Canada in 2008 do not suffer the persecution that others endure(d), it is true that all Christians suffer at some time for the sake of their faith. The range of suffering is vast. It can be experienced anytime a follower of Jesus evangelizes to an unbeliever. It can be endured whenever a Christian is mocked, shunned, or mistrusted for not “partying” or otherwise participating in unrestrained merriment. Persecution might fall upon a believer who upholds God’s Word by preaching something unpopular, and (s)he might come to be unfairly labelled as intolerant, prejudiced, or fanatical. A person might learn what it means to suffer like Christ by being highly scrutinized in their daily conduct, or when challenged by antagonists in on-the-spot religious or social debates, or by their association with the marginalized and disdained people in society (criminals, prostitutes, addicts, homeless, debilitated, or the diseased). The list goes right on to the point of being downtrodden, imprisoned, tortured, and killed, all for the cause of living and teaching like Jesus Christ.

The world hates Christ and His followers (John 15:18-19), and the dark forces relish any chance to confront the integrity of the church and draw attention to the sinful deeds of its associates. God calls upon Christians to keep the critics silent, or at least make their accusations ring hollow, by living holy lives at all times and especially during periods of persecution and suffering. This transcends time and is always relevant to Christians.

Christians must accept that God sometimes uses hardship to test true faith, to help people grow, and to teach people to trust in Him above all else. In the understanding of author Jerry Bridges, this means “We come more and more to depend on God and to desire only that which will count for eternity. God is pruning us so that we will be more fruitful.”<sup>50</sup>

How Christians conduct themselves, especially in dealing with adversity, gives strong testimony to the condition of their faith. Christians ought to consider how their actions and reactions (or lack thereof) are always evaluated by others as being an unfiltered representation of their integrity and a measure against their professed faith in Christ.

God makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust (Matt 5:45). Everyone faces suffering, be it the pain of enduring an illness, or the death of a loved one, or by being made the subject of slander, or by experiencing material loss and/or poverty. These things are among the realities of living and suffering in a

<sup>49</sup> Pliny the Younger; Letters, 10.96

<sup>50</sup> Bridges, Jerry ; *Trusting God* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1988), pp. 180-81

fallen world, and Christians are in no way exempt. The difference between a follower of Christ and an unbeliever should be in how such hardships are viewed and in what manner they are dealt with. Along with everything that Peter taught about suffering, the Christian should not sorrow as others which have no hope (1 Thes 4:13), for they will be comforted (Matt 5:4) and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes (Rev 21:4).

Soli Deo Gloria.

F. Clint Whitney



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