

## Simon Peter, Suffering for Righteousness

### 1 Peter 3:13-5:13

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The video version is at: <https://youtu.be/k-N3K0LrBQw>

The scripture reading is 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 3:13-5:13

While Peter was in Rome after Paul left to travel to Spain, he built on Paul's work of spreading the gospel to the inhabitants of the capital city of the Roman Empire. Peter traveled with a large entourage including his wife, John Mark the author of the gospel based on Peter's teachings, and Clement who will carry on Peter's work after his death. Peter's group had such success in Rome that they came to the notice of the Roman officials and Emperor Nero. Persecution of the Followers of the Way, which had until now, had been mostly from unbelieving Jews would soon become an official Roman policy. What was in store for believers and how would Peter address these concerns?

In Peter's first epistle written from Rome, he reminded believers that the foundation of their faith was through the death and resurrection of Yeshua. He described the life of the believer as one of submission particularly submission and service to one another. He urged them to submit to governmental authority to bring glory to God and to demonstrate that believers were not evil doers as their detractors asserted. Even as Peter is writing these words, Roman society led by the depraved Emperor Nero is turning against them. First Fruits of Zion in Chronicles of the Apostles writes:

The Roman world (and especially Nero) resented the moral purity and lofty sexual ethics of the Christians. Those who fell under the superstitious influence of the Christians abandoned their habitual indulgence in "sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries."<sup>i</sup>

Although Jewish believers were used to some persecution from Gentiles, they were now being persecuted by both their fellow Jews and the Gentiles. The Gentile believers may not have experienced this level of ostracism before, but now they were facing persecution from their fellow Gentiles as well as non-believing Jews who refused to allow any believers to participate in worship at the Jewish synagogues. Believers were facing hatred from all around them. Yet Peter was instructing them to be in submission to governmental authority and to focus on doing good deeds.

1 Peter 3:13-14 NKJV 13 And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? 14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled."

Peter instructs believers who are facing hatred and persecution from all around them not to be afraid or troubled. They are instead to consider themselves blessed when the hate of those around them causes them to suffer.

Yeshua told his listeners that, although those who followed after righteousness would face suffering, they would also be blessed. They would receive the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:10-12 NKJV 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of

evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Peter is paraphrasing the words of Isaiah to King Ahaz of Judah when the mighty empire of Assyria began the invasion of Israel and Syria to Judah's immediate north. Judah would be next to face the armies of Assyria.

Isaiah 8:12-13 NKJV 12 "Do not say, 'A conspiracy,' Concerning all that this people call a conspiracy, Nor be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled. 13 The LORD of hosts, Him you shall hallow; Let Him be your fear, And let Him be your dread.

Isaiah called on Ahaz and the people of Judah to sanctify God. Peter gives the same instructions to his readers.

1 Peter 3:15-16 NKJV 15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; 16 having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.

Peter implies that those who observe believers' behavior under persecution will question where they get their hope. The book of Acts is filled with examples of the disciples being called to give an explanation for their actions and their hope. Peter and John when called before the Sanhedrin were ready to defend their faith and their actions. Stephen defended the gospel against his accusers and, in the crowd, was one who at first rejected Stephen's words but later became the greatest defender of the gospel. Luke records that Paul was often called on to explain his hope and defend the gospel. Yeshua instructed his believers that the Holy Spirit would provide the words of defense.

Luke 12:11-12 NKJV 11 "Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. 12 "For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."

Peter, then, turns to the example of the suffering of Yeshua to instruct believers that suffering for doing good is not outside of God's will.

1 Peter 3:18-20 NKJV 18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, 19 by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, 20 who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.

Yeshua's suffering for us is so that we can be brought into the presence of God! He suffered death yet was made alive by the Spirit!

John 10:17-18 NKJV 17 "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. 18 "No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father."

Peter states that it is by the same spirit through which Yeshua was raised from the dead that Yeshua also preached to the spirits in prison. The Greek word for spirit here is "pneuma," number 4151 in Strong's Greek Concordance meaning a breath of air. It is used in the Brit Hadashah or New Testament to refer to the Spirit of God, human spirits, and angelic or demonic spirits.

What did Peter mean when he referred to spirits in this verse? There are three main opinions about what Peter is referring to. The first is that these are the demonic spirits who either were or possessed the Sons of God to marry the daughters of men in Noah's generation who were thoroughly evil. The Greek word translated as "preaching" is "kay-roos'-so," number 2784 meaning to herald, proclaim or preach. In this case, Yeshua proclaimed His victory over sin to the demonic spirits then in prison.

The second opinion is that the spirits are the spirits of the people alive during Noah's day and that Yeshua went to them to proclaim the gospel message. However, the scriptures do not support the idea of a second chance after death. In this case, Yeshua is declaring His victory over sin to the wicked generation that compares to the generation of His return.

The third opinion is that Peter is describing Yeshua preaching through Noah through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Peter describes Noah as a preacher of righteousness in his second epistle. In this case, although Noah proclaimed the message of God's righteousness, the people remained disobedient to God and thus received the punishment of prison for their disobedience.

Whichever opinion is correct about the identity of the spirits that Yeshua is preaching to, Peter concludes that only Noah and his family were actually saved. The physical agent of their salvation was through the water, but the others of that generation drowned in the same water. Peter compares the salvation of Noah and his family to baptism through the resurrection of Yeshua.

1 Peter 3:21-22 NKJV 21 There is also an antitype which now saves us--baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.

Since Yeshua's suffering led to our salvation, we also, need to be willing to suffer. Further, that suffering leads to the death of our flesh and life through the spirit.

1 Peter 4:1-3 NKJV 1 Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 2 that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. 3 For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles--when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries.

Staying with the analogy of Noah; Peter states that like the generation of Noah thought Noah to be a strange character, so too, the generation of Peter's day thinks the behavior of believers to be strange. But, like with the generation of Noah, judgement will come!

1 Peter 4:4-5 NKJV 4 In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. 5 They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

This raises the question about the believers who have already died. What happens to those, especially the believers like Stephen, who were judged guilty by men and executed? Peter states that they, like Yeshua, will live through the spirit.

1 Peter 4:6-7 NAS95 6 For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to the will of God.

7 The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.

Paul addressed this same concern in his first letter to the Thessalonians and his second letter to the Corinthians assuring believers that those who died before the return of Yeshua would be resurrected from the dead.

In the meantime, believers need to be watchful and sincere in their beliefs and lifestyle. Peter had already admonished believers to put away fleshly lusts; now he encourages believers to love and serve each other.

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

Peter, then, returns to the subject that seems to weigh heavy on his heart—the trials that the believers face. Perhaps Peter was seeing even as he wrote this letter that believers would be facing serious trials in the days ahead.

1 Peter 4:12-13 NKJV 12 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; 13 but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

Peter describes suffering as a trial leading to purification and triumph. So, believers are to be glad to suffer along the same lines as Yeshua suffered. Peter warns that suffering because of wrong doing is not the same and does not lead to the glory of God.

1 Peter 4:14-16 NKJV 14 If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. 15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. 16 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.

As Peter gets ready to close his letter, he returns to the concept of submission. Even a good leader needs to understand the idea of submission as opposed to exalting himself above those he leads.

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

Younger believers are to receive the instruction of their elders and be humble. Those who are not humble, risk falling to the temptations thrown out by the adversary, the devil.

1 Peter 5:5-9 NKJV 5 Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." 6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, 7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. 8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your

adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 9 Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.

Resisting the devil and the lures of the world will lead to receiving the awaited prize, glory in Christ.

1 Peter 5:10-11 NAS95 10 After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. 11 To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.

In the days after Peter writes this letter, he will face challenges to his authority and the gospel message. Peter would once again encounter Simon the Magus who desired to purchase the ability to bestow the Holy Spirit on whomever he chose as recorded in Acts chapter 8. Eusebius records Simon's opposition to Peter in Rome.

Arriving in Rome, he achieved such success that the citizens erected his statue and honored him as a god. But his success was brief. Hot on his heels in the same reign as Claudius, a gracious providence brought to Rome the great and mighty Peter, chosen for his merits as leader of the other apostles.<sup>ii</sup>

Although Eusebius places this event in the reign of Claudius, Peter was unlikely to have made a trip to Rome before his final trip at the time of Emperor Nero. Peter's second letter to the believers focuses on watching out for these false teachers. Peter indicates that he is writing it knowing that he will soon be executed.

2 Peter 1:13-14 NKJV 13 Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, 14 knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me.

Peter warns against false prophets and teachers who claim they are part of the body of believers.

2 Peter 2:1 NKJV 1 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.

Peter would be executed shortly after sending this letter to the believers in 64 or 65 CE. At this time, the persecution by Nero reached a fever pitch. John MacArthur in his commentary on 1 Peter relates that in 64 CE a fire in Rome raged through the city. Although it was rumored that Nero set the fire, Nero blamed it on the Christians adding fuel to the anti-Christian rhetoric of the city.

Nero's ploy was a clever one because Christians in the Roman Empire were already the unjust targets of much hatred and slander. Unbelievers falsely reported that Christians consumed human flesh and blood during the Lord's Supper and that the holy kiss was actually a sign of uncontrolled lust.<sup>iii</sup>

Nero used this opportunity to arrest many believers in the city and put them to death. Peter was among those arrested. Paul was added to the number after his arrest in Miletus. Even Paul's citizenship was not enough this time to save him from the wrath of Nero. Eusebius records that Bishop Dionysius of Corinth confirms the fate of Peter and Paul.

By your great counsel you have bound together what has grown from the seed that Peter and Paul sowed among Romans and Corinthians. For both of them sowed in our Corinth and instructed us together; in Italy too they taught jointly in the same place and were martyred at the same time.<sup>iv</sup>

This persecution of the believers under Nero marked a turning point for them. The world as they knew it would never be the same. Up until this point, believers were considered a sect within Judaism and allowed the

same freedom of religion enjoyed by all the Jews. However, the great number of Gentile believers joining the faith disrupted the balance of power. The corrupt Roman society were both convicted and offended by the changed lives of the Gentile believers. The Jewish unbelievers led by the corrupt priesthood were likewise convicted and offended by the holy and Torah adherent lifestyles of the believing Jews epitomized by James the brother of Yeshua. The inclusion of Gentiles into the fellowship of believing Jews only exacerbated the situation.

The year is 65 CE just five short years before the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. What would happen next?

Study Questions:

1. How do we sanctify God in our hearts?
2. One of the implications of Peter's instruction in his epistle is that through our actions in the face of persecution and trials, we provide a powerful witness to the gospel of Yeshua. How is this manifest in our lives today? How can we show the same kind of steadfastness to the gospel in our daily lives?
3. What are the blessings promised to those who suffer righteousness?
4. To what spirits do you think Peter was referring to in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 3:18-20? Do you agree with any of the major three opinions mentioned in the teaching and why?
5. Compare the mission and message of Peter to that of Paul. What are the similarities? What are the differences? Is there any contradiction between them?
6. What new insight did you gain from this teaching? How do you respond to this new insight? How will you realign your life based on this new understanding?

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<sup>i</sup> Chronicles of the Apostles. D.T. Lancaster. First Fruits of Zion. ©2011, 2016. Book 4 Page 1000.

<sup>ii</sup> Eusebius: The Church History. Paul L. Maier. Kregel Publications ©1999, 2007 Paul L. Maier. Book 2, Ch 13. Page 63-64.

<sup>iii</sup> John MacArthur, The MacArthur Commentary 1<sup>st</sup> Peter, Moody Press, 2004, p248.

<sup>iv</sup> Eusebius: The Church History. Paul L. Maier. Kregel Publications ©1999, 2007 Paul L. Maier. Book 2, Ch 13. Page 75.