

Feed My Sheep: 1 & 2 Peter Suffering for Christ

Lesson #6 for May 6, 2017

Scriptures: 1 Peter 1:6; 3:13-22; 4:12-14,17-19; 2 Timothy 3:12; Revelation 12:17.

1. Almost from its beginning, the story of the Christian church has been a story of troubles, trials, and persecution. After all, look at what happened to Jesus. Without a doubt, the Devil is alive and well on planet Earth.
2. Read 1 Peter 1:6-7 and 5:10. Near the beginning of this letter and also at the end, Peter talked about sufferings, trials, even testing by fire. Is this a metaphor for purification?
3. Even though this epistle is very short, 1 Peter has three fairly extensive passages dealing with suffering for Christ. (1 Peter 2:18-25; 3:13-21; 4:12-19) While we do not know exactly where Peter was and what he was doing when this letter was written, it is even possible that he was in prison. Before being crucified upside down, Peter was imprisoned in Rome.
4. Should we as Christians really expect to suffer in our day in our countries with “freedom of religion” and “freedom of speech”? Why is it necessary for Christians to suffer persecution? Couldn't God protect them? Do real Christians need to “follow the Lamb wherever he goes”? (Revelation 14:4; *Testimonies*, vol. 2, 634.2) Remember where the Lamb went! Do we as Christians need to follow Him that far? It is interesting to note that Revelation 14:3-4 says:

³The 144,000 people stood before the throne, the four living creatures, and the elders; they were singing a new song, which only they could learn. They are the only ones who have been redeemed. ⁴They are the men who have kept themselves pure by not having sexual relations with women; they are virgins. **They follow the Lamb wherever he goes.** They have been redeemed from the rest of the human race and are the first ones to be offered to God and to the Lamb.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Revelation 14:3-4). New York: American Bible Society. [Bold type is added.]

5. So, what is the purpose for trials and persecution? (See Matthew 10:38; 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23.) Is it really necessary for Christians to suffer? Notice these three succinct statements from this letter: 1) 1 Peter 1:7 (*GNB*): “Their purpose is to prove that your faith is genuine.” 2) 1 Peter 5:10 (*GNB*): “God... will himself perfect you and give you firmness, strength, and a sure foundation.” 3) 1 Peter 4:13-14 (*GNB*): ¹³Rather be glad that you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may be full of joy when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴Happy are you if you are insulted because you are Christ's followers; this means that the glorious Spirit, the Spirit of God, is resting on you.” See also James 1:3 (*GNB*): “You know that when your faith succeeds in facing such trials, the result is the ability to endure.” (See Revelation 14:12.)
6. Pliny the younger ruled Bithynia in A.D. 103, and then, was elected to be an *Auger*, a person who studied the flights and behavior of birds to direct the government of Rome. From A.D. 104-110, he was a member of Trajan's judicial council. In A.D. 110-113—long after Peter was dead—he was chosen again to rule in Bithynia and Pontus (northwestern Turkey today).

...The method I have observed towards those who have been denounced to me as Christians is this: 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....

Those who denied they were, or had ever been, Christians, who repeated after me an invocation to the Gods, and offered adoration, with wine and frankincense, to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for that purpose, together with those of the Gods, and who finally cursed Christ—none of which acts, it is said, those who are really Christians can be forced into performing—these I thought it proper to discharge. Others who were named by that informer at first confessed themselves Christians, and then denied it; true, they had been of that persuasion but they had quitted it, some three years, others many years, and a few as much as twenty-five years ago. They all worshipped your statue and the images of the Gods, and cursed Christ.—*Pliny Letters** (London: William Heinemann, 1915), book 10:96 (vol. 2, pp. 401-403).

[<https://archive.org/stream/letterswithengli02plinuoft#page/400/mode/2up/search/401>]

7. It was unusual to worship a living emperor in Peter's day. Although in that section of Asia Minor—now modern Turkey—it sometimes happened. There were times in the 1st century that Christians faced serious danger just for being Christians. That was particularly true under Emperors Nero (10/13/54–06/09/68 A.D.) and Domitian (09/14/81–09/18/96 A.D.).
8. Read 1 Peter 2:12; 3:9; and 4:14. In this short letter, Peter seemed to be focusing more on local troubles including false accusations, revilings, and reproach. These trials may have been very hard on new Christians; but, they probably did not result in widespread imprisonment or death.
9. By contrast, what do we expect to happen at the end of this world's history?

At all times and in all places, in all sorrows and in all afflictions, when the outlook seems dark and the future perplexing, and we feel helpless and alone, the Comforter will be sent in answer to the prayer of [670] faith. Circumstances may separate us from every earthly friend; but no circumstance, no distance, can separate us from the heavenly Comforter. Wherever we are, wherever we may go, He is always at our right hand to support, sustain, uphold, and cheer.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 669.4-670.0.

When He leaves the sanctuary, darkness covers the inhabitants of the earth. In that fearful time the righteous must live in the sight of a holy God without an intercessor. **The restraint which has been upon the wicked is removed, and Satan has entire control of the finally impenitent. God's long-suffering has ended.** The world has rejected His mercy, despised His love, and trampled upon His law. The wicked have passed the boundary of their probation; the Spirit of God, persistently resisted, has been at last withdrawn. Unsheltered by divine grace, they have no protection from the wicked one. **Satan will then plunge the inhabitants of the earth into one great, final trouble. As the angels of God cease to hold in check the fierce winds of human passion, all the elements of strife will be let loose. The whole world will be involved in ruin more terrible than that which came upon Jerusalem of old.**

A single angel destroyed all the first-born of the Egyptians and filled the land

with mourning. When David offended against God by numbering the people, one angel caused that terrible destruction by which his sin was punished. **The same destructive power exercised by holy angels when God commands, will be exercised by evil angels when He permits. There are forces now ready, and only waiting the divine permission, to spread desolation everywhere.**—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (1888)* 614.1-2. [Bold type is added.]

10. Read 1 Peter 3:13-22. In these verses Peter made it clear that if we suffer because we have done what is wrong, that is expected. But, if we suffer for doing what is right, we need to be happy about it. But, more than that, we must “Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you.” (1 Peter 3:15, *GNB*)
11. Read 1 Peter 3:14 again; compare Matthew 5:10. Wasn't Peter just echoing the words of Jesus? Peter went on to say in 1 Peter 3:15 that when persecution comes, we should keep our eyes focused on the promises we have in Jesus. That will help to allay our fears.
12. What is it that we will face in the future that might cause fear?

The “time of trouble, such as never was,” is soon to open upon us; and we shall need an experience which we do not now possess and which many are too indolent to obtain. **It is often the case that trouble is greater in anticipation than in reality; but this is not true of the crisis before us. The most vivid presentation cannot reach the magnitude of the ordeal.** In that time of trial, every soul must stand for himself before God. “Though Noah, Daniel, and Job” were in the land, “as I live, saith the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son [623] nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness.” Ezekiel 14:20.—*Ibid.** 622.4-625.0.

As the decree issued by the various rulers of Christendom against commandment keepers shall withdraw the protection of government and abandon them to those who desire their destruction, the people of God will flee from the cities and villages and associate together in companies, dwelling in the most desolate and solitary places. Many will find refuge in the strongholds of the mountains. Like the Christians of the Piedmont valleys, they will make the high places of the earth their sanctuaries and will thank God for “the munitions of rocks.” Isaiah 33:16. **But many of all nations and of all classes, high and low, rich and poor, black and white, will be cast into the most unjust and cruel bondage. The beloved of God pass weary days, bound in chains, shut in by prison bars, sentenced to be slain, some apparently left to die of starvation in dark and loathsome dungeons. No human ear is open to hear their moans; no human hand is ready to lend them help.**—*Ibid.** 626.1. [Bold type is added.]

When Christ ceases His intercession in the sanctuary, the unmingled wrath threatened against those who worship the beast and his image and receive his mark (Revelation 14:9, 10), will be poured out. The plagues upon Egypt when God was about to deliver Israel were similar in character to those [628] more terrible and extensive judgments which are to fall upon the world just before the final deliverance of God's people.—*Ibid.** 627.3.

13. Read 1 Peter 3:16. In this verse, he suggested that if we are always doing what is right, finally, those who persecute us will be ashamed of it! That was clearly exemplified in the life

of Jesus Himself. His purity and the love of the people for Jesus stood as a constant rebuke to those who hated Him.

14. But, Jesus did what was needed. He died for our sins. By His life and His death, He answered the most important questions in the great controversy, disproving all of Satan's accusations against God.
15. Have you ever suffered for doing what was right?
16. Is Peter the only one who talked about the suffering that Christians should be expecting? See 2 Timothy 3:12 and John 15:18.
17. We know why Christ suffered. What is the reason why we will suffer? We know that Satan would love to destroy all of God's people so he could claim this earth as his domain. Is that the main reason why Christians suffer? Or, is it to prove to the universe that there is an entire group of people who will stand for the right and love each other even under the worst possible circumstances—like Job did? God promised that there will be a group like that someday, and they should consider His example. Remember Jesus's words:

Matthew 24:9-10: ⁹“Then you will be arrested and handed over to be punished and be put to death. All nations will hate you because of me. ¹⁰Many will give up their faith at that time; they will betray one another and hate one another.”—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Matthew 24:9-10). New York: American Bible Society.

18. Ellen White commented:

So it will be with all who live godly in Christ Jesus. Persecution and reproach await all who are imbued with the Spirit of Christ. The character of the persecution changes with the times, but the principle—the spirit that underlies it—is the same that has slain the chosen of the Lord ever since the days of Abel.—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles** 576.2; *SD** 307.3. Compare *MB* 29.2.

19. Read Revelation 12:17 and 14:12.

The dragon was furious with the woman and went off to fight against the rest of her descendants, all those who obey God's commandments and are faithful to the truth revealed by Jesus. (Revelation 12:17, *GNB**)

This calls for endurance on the part of God's people, those who obey God's commandments and are faithful to Jesus. (Revelation 14:12, *GNB**)

20. We know that Tertullian (c. 155–c. 240 AD) in *Apologeticus*, Chapter 50 made the statement: “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” Why would that be?
21. Peter suggested that the trial that will come against Christians will be as if it is a “fiery trial.” That is a good example for us to consider. As we know, fire can be terribly destructive; but, it can also purify as in the cases of removing impurities from both silver and gold. So, what can we do to prepare ourselves for that time which we know is coming soon?

None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great [594] conflict.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 593.2-594.0.

22. Read 1 Peter 4:17-19; Isaiah 10:10-12; and Malachi 3:1-6. These three passages suggest that the judgment and trials will come first to God's chosen people. Surely, these are the ones that the Devil most wants to harass, persecute, and even destroy.

23. Are these trials actually linked to the judgment of God? (See 1 Peter 4:19.)
24. Read Luke 18:1-8. This familiar parable reminds us that to be successful, it may be necessary to persist until we endure hard troubles. In biblical times, judgments were usually something highly desirable. That widow, although she could not pay for lawyers or bribe the judge, finally got justice by persisting.
25. So, let us try to grapple with the question, “Why the suffering?” That was surely the question which Job had. Read Job 1:8. At the beginning of that whole encounter, God had declared Job to be a righteous and upright man. So, why was it necessary for Job to suffer?
26. Compare 1 Peter 5:8; Ephesians 6:12; Revelation 12:7-9; and Revelation 2:10. The short answer is that we suffer because we are in the midst of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. This is not a mere metaphor; it is not a mere symbol for the good and evil in our natures. There is a real Devil and a real Jesus, fighting a real battle for human beings. And that controversy takes place between our ears—in our brains. It is a controversy over the beliefs and minds of human beings. Christians need to recognize that we may not be able to give an answer for why we are suffering at any given moment; remember Job.
27. Does suffering help us to understand better the life, ministry, and death of Jesus? How does suffering help us to understand the character of God? If we learn to endure suffering, does that make us more committed to the truth? Does it show that our love is real?
- Those who honor the law of God have been accused of bringing judgments upon the world, and they will be regarded as the cause of the fearful convulsions of nature and the strife and bloodshed among men that are filling the earth with woe. The power attending the last warning has enraged the wicked; their anger is kindled against all who have received the message, and Satan will excite to still greater intensity the spirit of hatred and persecution.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 614.3-615.0.
28. We have hinted at the idea that Peter was not the only one in the New Testament who foretold suffering, trials, and persecution. Consider the following passages from other writers: Matthew 5:10-12; 24:9-10; John 15:20; 2 Corinthians 12:10; 2 Timothy 3:12; and James 1:2-4,12.
29. In 1 Peter 4:19, Peter suggested that we need to trust ourselves completely to our Creator. What does that have to do with our suffering? Peter went on to say that the Creator always keeps His promises. When one is suffering, it is useful to remember that the great controversy has already been won by Jesus. There is no way that He can lose.
30. Do trials and troubles help us to grow our characters? See 1 Peter 4:12-13,19 and Hebrews 2:10; 5:8-9. In light of what we have studied so far, what does suffering actually do for us? In some way, might it help us to understand Jesus better?
31. There is an interesting break between 1 Peter 4:11 and the next verse—4:12. Since we know that this book was written about the time when Nero tried to burn down the city of Rome and then accused the Christians of being responsible, is it possible that the fiery trials mentioned in 1 Peter 4:12 are a reference to that event?
32. Peter seemed to be trying to make two key points in these passages we have studied. In 1 Peter 4:12-13, he suggested that we have been forewarned that trials are coming. See John 15:18-21; 16:2-4. Remember that the Gospel of John was not written until long after 1 Peter; however, the comments by Jesus which were later referred to by John had

occurred much earlier. Then, Peter went on to say that when we suffer for doing what is right, we are participating in the sufferings of Christ. That means that one day we will share in His glory; and our joy will be even greater. (1 Peter 1:6-7; James 1:2-4)

33. Read 1 Peter 4:14-16 and Acts 11:26; 26:28. These are the only three times in the New Testament where the name *Christian* is mentioned. This was not a name that was looked up to by the general population in those days; it was originally attached to Christians in Antioch as if to say: “These are the crazy people who look to a dead man to save them!”
34. In Ezekiel 8, the prophet described some of the terrible things that the children of Israel were doing in his day. He then went on in Ezekiel 9 to say that a time of testing and trial is coming. That time has come to be known as the pre-advent judgment. Traditionally, Seventh-day Adventists have believed that is the judgment which began in 1844 and which will end at the second coming of Jesus. A scribe was told to take an inkpot and mark those who were grieving and lamenting—who were distressed and troubled—because of all the disgusting things being done in the city. Would that be a reference to Christians in our day who are appalled at the wickedness going on in the world? In any case in Ezekiel 9:6, the scribe was followed by six judgment angels who were told to destroy anyone who did not have the mark, beginning at the house of God. So, what does that mark symbolize?

Just as soon as the people of God are sealed in their foreheads—it is not any seal or mark that can be seen, but a settling into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, so they cannot be moved—just as soon as God’s people are sealed and prepared for the shaking, it will come. Indeed, it has begun already; the judgments of God are now upon the land, to give us warning, that we may know what is coming.—Ellen G. White, *MS 173*,* 1902, p. 6. (“Medical Missionary Work in Southern California,” Interview held in Los Angeles, California, September 15, 1902); *4SDABC** 1161.6; *FLB** 287.7; *LDE** 219.4; *Mar** 200.2; *OFC** 83.6; *Ibid.** 328.2. [Bold type is added.]

35. All that we have seen in this lesson seems to suggest that there will be two very opposing sides in the great controversy at the time of the end. It will not be easy to be a Christian and a true representative of God in those days.

Matthew 24:37: The coming of the Son of Man will be like what happened in the time of Noah.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Matthew 24:37). New York: American Bible Society. Compare Luke 17:26.

36. There are many areas in our world even today where Christians are being persecuted. Yet, some of these areas contain some of the fastest growing Christian groups on earth. To understand what some are going through, see www.opendoorsUSA.org/Christian-persecution/stories.
37. Are we preparing ourselves for what is coming? Will we be so convinced of the truth that nothing the Devil can do will dissuade us? Or, convince us to compromise? Are we ready to give an answer to anyone who asks us? (1 Peter 5:8)

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