

The 1st Letter of Peter (Week 6)

As we noted last week there is a possibility that chapter 4, verse 11 was to be the close of the letter. In that case chapter 4, verse 11 to chapter 5, verse 14 was written as a “P.S.” These closing verses were certainly written at a time when persecution was already happening! Again, it is likely that this letter was written by Peter from Rome (“Babylon” in 5, v. 13). if so this could be the beginning of the vicious persecution under the Emperor Nero, (64 A.D.) when, it is said that, Christians were nightly burned as torches in the emperor’s gardens.

Read 1 Peter chapter 4, verse 12 to chapter 5, verse 14

Chapter 4, verses 12 – 19:- As Christians Peter exhorts us identify with Christ who suffered as a human being for our salvation. Persecution has always been a possibility for the Christian Church. An “easy ride” in our own country has, to a certain extent, blinded us to the common suffering which is taking place in many communities overseas.

As we read these verses, in this letter of Peter, let us unite in prayer for our Christian brothers and sisters facing destruction of their property and possibly death because of their faith.

In verses 17 -19 we are reminded that persecution does lead to a shaking out of individuals, according to their genuine commitment to Christ. Peter suggests that the judgement to come at the end of time will be severe enough for those of us who believe. What then will happen to unbelievers?

Chapter 5

This chapter begins with an exhortation to the “elders” of the congregations. **(verses 1 – 4)** along with a reminder to younger members, and to all of us, to respect and honour one another as fellow members of the body of Christ. **(verse 5)**

Verses 6 – 11:- We are reminded that, whatever happens in our lives, God the Father cares for us! In the dark days of gloom and despondency He is near and His hand is there, ready to lift us up. For our sisters and brothers, suffering under severe persecution, this should be our prayer for them; that the *“God of all grace . . . will Himself, restore, establish and strengthen”* them in their faith.

Verses 8 – 9:- For those already living under persecution, and for us, this reminder needs to be taken to heart. It is so easy to drop our defences and ignore the possibility of spiritual attack! The practical teaching of some of the indigenous (Amerindian) pastors in the Chaco of Northern Argentina has stayed with my wife and I over the years. “The Evil One, like a wild beast, is prowling round the outside of the thorn-bush fence surrounding our precious garden. Probing for a weakness. Pushing and thrusting his way through to destroy and trample that which we hold most dear.”

We must not to drop our guard! Peter, the apostle, so human in his frailty in denying his Lord, now fulfils his God given ministry as he writes to strengthen the brethren. (see Luke 22, verses 31 - 32)

His is the final word:- ***“I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.”*** (Chapter 5, verse 12)