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SPIRITUAL HOPE
Book of 1 Peter

INTRODUCTION
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“Living hope” is the major theme of Peter’s first letter. He is saying to all believers, “Be hopeful.”

Before we study the details of this fascinating letter, let’s get acquainted with the man who wrote it, the people to whom he sent it, and the particular situation that prompted him to write.

The Writer (1:1)

He identified himself as “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ” He further identified himself as a “bond-servant” (NASV) of Jesus in 2 Peter 1:1. This echoes the introductions of Paul in several of his letters. Indicating that these New Testament writers were both constrained and set loose by Christ Jesus.

We will see that it was a great persecution that brought these two men to Rome even though they had experienced different ministries. Paul was assigned especially to minister to the Gentiles, and Peter to the Jews (Gal. 2:1-10). Peter told his readers that this was a letter of encouragement and personal witness (1 Peter 5:12). Peter also indicated that he wrote this letter from Babylon (1 Peter 5:13). Rome is called “Babylon” in Revelation 17:5 and 18:10. It was not unusual for persecuted believers during those days to speak in “code.”

Peter probably arrived in Rome after Paul was released from his first imprisonment, about the year AD 62. First Peter was written about the year 63. Paul was martyred about 64, and perhaps that same year, or shortly after, Peter laid down his life for Christ.

The Recipients (1:1)

Peter called them “strangers” (NASV), which means “resident aliens, sojourners.” They are called “strangers and pilgrims” in 1 Peter 2:11. These people were citizens of heaven through faith in Christ (Phil. 3:20), and therefore were not permanent residents on earth. Like Abraham, they had their eyes of faith centered in the future city of God (Heb 11:8-16). They were in the world, but not of the world (John 17:16).

Because Christians are “strangers” in the world, they are considered to be “strange” in the eyes of the world (1 Peter 4:4), Christians have standards and values different from those of the world, and this gives opportunity both for witness and for warfare.

These believers were a “scattered” people as well as a “strange” people. They were scattered in five different parts of the Roman Empire, all of them in northern Asia Minor (modern Turkey).

The important thing for us to know about these “scattered strangers” is that they were going through a time of suffering and persecution. At least fifteen times in this letter Peter referred to suffering, and he used eight different Greek words to do so. Some of these Christians were suffering because they were living godly lives and doing what was good and right (2:19-23; 3:14-18; 4:1-4, 15-19). Others were suffering reproach for the name of Christ (4:14) and being railed at by unsaved people (3:9-10). Peter wrote to encourage them to be good witnesses to their persecutors, and to remember that their suffering would lead to glory (1:6-7; 4:13-14; 5:10).

According to Halley’s Bible handbook: *“Nero’s persecution of Christians, A.D. 64-67, was very severe in and around Rome, but not general over the Empire. However, the example of the Emperor encouraged the enemies of Christians everywhere to take advantage of the slightest pretext to persecute. ... The church was about 35 years old. It had suffered persecutions in various localities at the hands of local authorities. But now Imperial Rome, which had been indifferent, even in some cases friendly, had accused the Church of a terrible crime, and was undertaking to punish it. The great fire in Rome occurred in A.D. 64. Nero himself burned the city. Though an inhuman brute, he was a great builder. It was in order to build a new and grander Rome that he set fire to the city, and fiddled in glee at the sight of it. The people suspected him; and historians have commonly regarded it as a fact that he was the perpetrator of the crime. In order to divert suspicion from himself he accused the Christians of burning Rome. The Christians became easy scapegoats and were accused of the fires. In and around Rome multitudes of Christians were arrested and put to death in the most cruel ways. Crucified. Or tied in skins of animals, and thrown into the arena to be worried to death by dogs, for the entertainment of the people. Or thrown to the wild beast. Or tied to stakes in Nero’s gardens, pitch poured over their bodies, and their burning bodies used as torches to light Nero’s gardens at night.”*

The Message (5:12)

First Peter is a letter of encouragement. We have noted that the theme of suffering runs throughout the letter, but so also does the theme of glory (1:7-7, 11, 21; 2:12; 4:11-16; 5:1, 4, 10-11).

Peter is preeminently the apostle of *hope*, as Paul is the apostle of *faith* and John of *love*. But suffering does not automatically bring hope and blessing to God’s people and therefore glory to God. Some believers have fainted and fallen in time of trial and have brought shame to the name of Christ. It is only when we depend on the grace of God that we can glorify God in times of suffering. Peter also emphasized God’s grace in this letter. “I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it” (1 Peter 5:12 NIV). The word *grace* is used in every chapter of 1 Peter.

As we study 1 Peter, we will see how the three themes of suffering, grace, and glory unite to form an encouraging message for believers experiencing times of trial and persecution. These themes are summarized in 1 Peter 5:10, a verse we would do well to memorize.