



# Living in Babylon

## *Faithful to Christ in a hostile world*

### **READINGS AND PRAYERS FROM 1 PETER FOR SUFFERING CHURCH ACTION WEEK 2014**

**Thank you for joining with us in prayer for the persecuted Church.**

The New Testament uses the name "Babylon" to refer to a place of exile and suffering for Christians. And all over the world today, believers are living in our own "Babylons", where we endure contempt, rejection and hostility for Jesus's sake. But we are called to stay faithful to Him in the midst of our hostile world.

Our brothers and sisters who suffer the most because of their Christian faith desperately need our prayers, to help them stand firm in the face of their persecutions. And we need also to pray for ourselves wherever God has put us, so that we too can resist the pressure to fall away.

The first letter of Peter was written to nurture its readers' faith and discipleship and guide them in how to live as they struggled with pressure and hostility from their neighbours. So it can also inspire and direct our

prayers as we bring the needs of persecuted Christians to "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:3).

This prayer booklet, based on 1 Peter, has been designed for Suffering Church Action Week 2014, though it can be used at any time. For each day, you will find a suggested reading, a key verse, and a comment including ideas for prayer. You may like to use the booklet alongside the accompanying *Praying for the Persecuted Church 2014*, where you will find information on the conditions of Christians in the countries where they suffer the worst kinds of persecution.

**May God bless you as you pray for His persecuted family.**

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Scripture quotations are taken from the New International Version®.



**Suffering Church  
Action Week 2014**

  
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Sunday 26 October  
**EXILES ON THE EARTH**



**Read:**  
1 Peter 1:1-12

Key verse

***Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia***

(1 Peter 1:1)

Many Christians today have fled abroad to escape persecution at home. In Syria, our brothers and sisters have been caught up in the brutal violence of the civil war and have also been targeted by militant Islamists who want to drive them out of the country. Many have taken refuge in neighbouring countries or further afield, where they are exiles in a land that is not their own.

First Peter calls all its readers "exiles" (v. 1), but not because they – or we – have been expelled from their earthly homes. As Christians we are citizens of heaven: chosen by the Father, made holy by the Spirit, obedient to Christ (v. 2). So we are no longer at home on earth. Our beliefs and behaviour are different from those of wider society, and we face pressure and hostility at its hands.

Yet God has created us as His new people in Christ and has given us the great hope of salvation (vv. 3-5). The testing of our faith through persecution actually helps us to obtain that salvation (vv. 6-9), which is guaranteed as part of God's age-old purpose for us (vv. 10-12). We may be suffering, but we are also greatly blessed.

**Pray for Christians from Syria, Iraq and other countries who are living as exiles far from home, that the Lord will be a sanctuary for them wherever they have gone. Pray for all believers who are living under severe pressure or facing intense hostility from their neighbours or the authorities, and ask Him to sustain them in their faith and discipleship. Pray that they will be confident in their hope of salvation and that this will encourage them to persevere through their trials. Pray also for yourself, that you will endure the testing of your own faith.**

Monday 27 October  
**OUT WITH THE OLD,  
IN WITH THE NEW**



**Read:**  
1 Peter 1:13-25

Key verse

***As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.***

(1 Peter 1:14)

"Bishar" was a young recruit to the militant Islamist group al-Shabaab in Somalia. He was responsible for searching travellers at a roadblock and was supposed to confiscate any Christian material. But one day he took a copy of a Christian comic book from a trader, and when he read it, he was overwhelmed with longing for a new life in Christ. That very day he deserted al-Shabaab, and soon afterwards he joined a Christian church in another country.

Today's passage explains how our status as God's people and our hope of salvation are meant to be worked out in practice (v. 13). As Christians we are supposed to be different from how we used to be: to give up for good the sinful and useless ways of life that we followed before (v. 14) and to adopt a lifestyle marked by personal holiness (vv. 15-16). This includes both reverence before the God who is judge of all (vv. 17-21), and deep, heartfelt love for one another within the family of believers (vv. 22-25).

Giving up our old life can make us unpopular with people who still live that way. But our faith and hope in God allow us to persevere.

**Give thanks for Bishar and other Christian converts who put their new faith into practice by giving up their old sinful lifestyles. Pray that God will keep them safe from revenge attacks by their former friends. Pray too that He will guide and empower all Christians to live holy lives of worship and mutual love, especially those who can do so only at great personal cost. Pray about any difficulties you may be facing because of your own love for Christ, and ask Him to strengthen your faith and hope so that you can endure them and stay faithful.**

Tuesday 28 October  
**HONoured IN CHRIST**



**Read:**  
1 Peter 2:1-10

Key verse

***But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.***

(1 Peter 2:9)

On 22 September 2013, a bomb blast tore through All Saints Church in Peshawar, Pakistan, killing more than 100 people. Many of the Christians were badly hurt, and some lost their entire families. Yet remarkably, they continue to testify to their present blessings and future hope in Christ. They are models of faithfulness in the face of acute hostility.

These verses continue to encourage us to live a life that reflects our great hope of salvation and our high standing as God's people. They call us again to reject wrong attitudes and behaviour (v. 1), and they encourage us to drink the nourishing milk of God's Word so as to become mature Christians and receive that salvation in the future (vv. 2-3).

But our wonderful privileges as God's people are for the present too. In verses 4-10 the writer piles one word-picture on another to show how blessed we already are as Christians. Christ was rejected by the ungodly, but He is chosen and precious to God, and having come to Him we now share His honoured status. Those who reject Him, however, are put to shame.

As the persecuted Christians of Peshawar know, these privileges give Christ's people the best of reasons to stay faithful to Him.

**Praise God for the inspiring example of the wounded and bereaved Christians of Peshawar in their faithfulness to the Lord. Pray for them and other Christians who suffer extreme aggression and violence because of their faith, that God will nourish them through His Word and enable them to grow in Christ. Give thanks for the immense privileges that we have in Him, and for our great hope of salvation in the future. Ask that these blessings will encourage all God's people as we experience rejection and hostility, and that we will be able to stand firm for Him.**

Wednesday 29 October

## GIVE NO UNNECESSARY OFFENCE



Read:  
1 Peter 2:11-25

Key verse

***Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.***

(1 Peter 2:12)

A Christian group in Sri Lanka has created guidelines for how Christians should live and minister in their hostile environment. It includes adopting a simple lifestyle consistent with that of local villages and being culturally sensitive to their community. The idea is to avoid provoking unnecessary persecution without compromising their Christian integrity.

At the start of this section, the readers are urged both to stand apart from the sinful practices of non-Christian society, and to practise its best virtues (vv. 11-12). By not yielding to our sinful desires, we safeguard ourselves against God's judgment. But by living in ways that even non-Christians think are right, we give them no excuse to abuse us.

This general appeal is then applied to specific social relationships. Christian citizens relating to governments (vv. 13-17), Christian slaves relating to masters (vv. 18-20) – and all Christians – are to submit to established authority and follow the best practices of our cultures. But if we do all this and are still persecuted, then we are to endure the suffering, without retaliating but trusting in God, following Christ's example (vv. 21-24).

Living good lives among non-Christians will not protect us from all persecution. But this is the best way of minimising it.

**Give thanks for the thoughtful and sensitive approach of the Christians in Sri Lanka to their non-Christian neighbours. Pray for all Christians living under intense pressure, that they will both reject sin and avoid giving unnecessary offence to others. Pray especially for the Lord's guidance for those living under repressive regimes or working for harsh employers, that they may be godly and righteous citizens and workers. Ask Him to enable us all not to hit back when we are unjustly persecuted, but to endure the suffering after His example by trusting in God.**

Thursday 30 October

## REVENGE OR GRACE?



Read:  
1 Peter 3:1-12

Key verse

***Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.***

(1 Peter 3:9)

Lukia Khalid, a pregnant mother-of-three in Tanzania, was thrown out of her home by her Muslim husband in 2013 because she had left Islam and become a Christian. The husband threatened to kill her if she did not recant. Her story illustrates the extreme difficulties sometimes faced by Christian converts who are married to unbelievers.

This passage (vv. 1-7) teaches us that Christian husbands and wives – including those married to non-Christians – are to conform to socially accepted norms in marriage where these are consistent with our faith and lifestyle. But where they are not – as when a husband tries to bully his wife into giving up her faith – we are to do what is right without fear of the consequences. And Christian spouses are to treat each other with respect, because we stand equal before God. The letter's appeal for right conduct by all Christians is then renewed (vv. 8-12). When we suffer hostility because of our faith, we are not to let it damage our relationships with other believers, and we are not to fight back against our persecutors, but instead we are to bless them. By meeting persecution with kindness and humility, we will be able to resist the pressure it puts on us to fall away.

**Pray for Lukia and all Christians who are ill-treated by their non-Christian spouses, that the Lord will empower them to withstand the pressure that they experience. Pray for all Christian husbands and wives, that in their relationships they may remain faithful to Christ and help to diminish suspicion and resentment towards Christians. Pray too for robust Christian marriages that will strengthen the Church to stand firm in faith. Pray for harmony among Christians in the face of persecution, and that we may not retaliate against those who hurt us, but may respond instead with blessing.**

Friday 31 October

## MAKING SENSE OF SUFFERING



Read:  
1 Peter 3:13 – 4:11

Key verse

***But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened."***

(1 Peter 3:14)

Christians in Laos often suffer gross injustice and harsh persecution from local officials. Many are given a choice: either renounce their faith or leave their villages. Some have been physically evicted and have had to survive – or not – on the edge of the jungle. How are believers to make sense of such unjust torment?

This section assures us that our undeserved suffering as Christians cannot finally hurt us but actually leads to our blessing, provided that we handle it properly. This means not being frightened by those who make us suffer, but being faithful to Christ as Lord while not provoking others needlessly (3:13-17). The promised blessing is certain because Christ has won the victory over every evil and persecuting power (3:18-22).

When living in a society that is hostile to our faith, we should not follow its practices but do the will of God, despite the abuse this provokes, in light of God's final judgment (4:1-6). And we should build up the Christian community (4:7-11) to be a source of strength and protection for its members.

If we act on these directions, then our unjust sufferings – however painful at the time – will indeed work out for our good. We can be assured of sharing in Christ's victory.

**Pray for Christians in Laos and elsewhere who suffer grievous injustices because of their faith. Ask that in the midst of their distress they may have the assurance of God's blessing and of sharing in Christ's victory. Give thanks for this promise, and pray that it may sustain all Christians in our unjust persecutions. Pray that we may do the will of God even if others insult us, and that our churches may give us the stability we need to face hostility. Pray that we may be faithful to Christ in all things, while giving no unnecessary offence to others.**

Saturday 1 November  
**PASSING THROUGH  
THE FIRE**



**Read:**  
**1 Peter 4:12-19**

Key verse

***So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.***

(1 Peter 4:19)

A group of pastors in Kyrgyzstan who face persecution from local Muslims attended a conference about the place of suffering in the Christian life. Afterwards, one of them said, "Now I understand that I need to face suffering with joy and gratitude."

These verses explain the nature of Christian suffering and the proper response to it, in light of God's final judgment. Persecution is to be expected, but remarkably it is also ground for rejoicing. It shows us that we will share God's glory in the future, and indeed that we do so already (vv. 12-16).

Anti-Christian persecution is the beginning of God's fiery judgment on the world; it is intended to test whether we are really His people. If we stay faithful in the face of hostility, God will find in our favour, while the fire will eventually consume His enemies. So we are to entrust ourselves to God by continuing to do His will (vv. 17-19).

Being insulted or ill-treated because of our faith puts us under pressure to give up on it, but even at such a cost it is worthwhile to persist. If we are faithful we will come through the fire of judgment, while those who persecute us will not.

**Pray for the pastors and church leaders in Kyrgyzstan and elsewhere who are persecuted because of their Christian faith and ministry. Pray that they and the Christians they serve may have a right perspective on their sufferings and on how to respond. Ask that even those who are most severely afflicted may be able to rejoice because of their sharing in God's glory now and in the future. Pray that we may all pass through the fire of persecution with our faith and discipleship intact and that God may vindicate us at the last.**

Sunday 1 November  
**STANDING FAST IN  
GOD'S GRACE**



**Read:**  
**1 Peter 5:1-14**

Key verse

***Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.***

(1 Peter 5:8)

The fires of anti-Christian persecution rage around the world. An estimated one in ten Christians are disadvantaged, harassed or actively oppressed for their faith, while the other 90% face more subtle social pressures to fall away. The scope and extent of this hostility point to a supernatural source.

In the midst of these fiery trials, the Christian community needs effective leadership, but this must be the pastoral leadership of the shepherd, on the pattern of Christ. Other Christians should follow such leaders, but both shepherds and flock must also be humble towards each other. By these means, we can survive the pressures and share in the coming glory (vv. 1-5).

These verses also confirm that the ultimate source of anti-Christian hostility and persecution is supernatural: the devil. We are to resist him by staying faithful, in solidarity with our suffering brothers and sisters throughout the world, and in humility before God and dependence on Him. If we do, God will rescue and restore us in the end (vv. 6-11).

Written from "Babylon", the place of exile for God's people, this letter testifies to the favour of God given to us in Christ. Let us stand firm in it and remain faithful to Christ in our hostile world (vv. 12-14).

**Pray for all Christians in our various experiences of persecution, and especially for the one in ten who suffer most severely for Christ. Ask God to raise up and strengthen Christian leaders to shepherd the churches after the example of Christ, and for unity and humility between them and those they lead. Pray that God will equip us each day for the spiritual battle that we fight and give us confidence of ultimate victory. Give thanks for God's grace shown to us in Christ, and ask that we may all remain faithful to Him in the face of hostility.**

**Further reading**

Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990.

I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter*. Downers Grove and Nottingham: IVP, 2011.

Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians*. Vol. II. Downers Grove and Nottingham: IVP/Apollos, 2007.

Tom Wright, *Early Christian Letters for Everyone*. London: SPCK, 2011, pp. 45-98.

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