

Studies in First Peter

"What Would Noah Do?"

First Peter 3:13-22

Introduction

If you are a Christian, you are probably in the minority in one or more of the places you spend most of your time:

1. You might work among mostly unsaved.
2. You might attend school with mostly unsaved.
3. Or it could be closer to home for you: Your spouse or family might be mostly unsaved.

At times you will be a **persecuted** minority. Your very presence among the unsaved is like a light shining in a dark place and they prefer the darkness to the light. Try as you might to live right, the people around you will "defame" you or "revile" you simply because you are a Christian. It can seem overwhelming.

If or when you find yourself a persecuted minority, ask this question: **"What would Noah do?"** *Talk about a persecuted minority!* In the years between Adam and Noah the world's population was exploding. With people living as long as nine-hundred years, using even a conservative formula, you calculate there would have been between *five to nine billion people* on the earth. Among those billions there was only one man, his wife, his three sons and their wives - eight people in all - who were believers. And, yes, they were being "defamed" and "reviled" on a daily basis - especially during the decades they were building the Ark. Just imagine the ridicule as Noah and his family were warning of a global flood and constructing a gigantic barge to survive the predicted catastrophe.

In terms of its sheer magnitude, the daily defamation and reviling Noah and his family were subjected to was way worse than anything you or I will ever experience. Still, we have our persecutions. We can take a page out of Noah's book because we know what he did in

response. Peter mentioned Noah preparing the ark in verses twenty and twenty-one. But Noah did more than *prepare*; he *preached*. In Second Peter 2:5 he called Noah "a preacher of righteousness." Everyday, while the ark was being prepared, Noah preached the Gospel to the lost. As one commentator put it, before he began building the ark he built a podium from which he might preach to sinners the message of salvation.

Let's bring all this to bear upon our own persecution. When people attack you for doing good, simply because you are a Christian, there is a natural tendency to question God. "*Why, Lord? Why am I suffering for doing what is right?*" From Noah you learn that rather than **question** God, you ought to give an **answer** to those who persecute you!

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Instead Of Questioning Your Suffering, Give An Answer For It, and #2 Instead Of Questioning God's Longsuffering, Give An Answer To Him.

#1 Instead Of Questioning Your Suffering,
Give An Answer For It
(v13-17)

Peter used the words "harm," "suffer," "defame," and "revile." He was not yet talking about things like illnesses or injuries; he would get to those types of trials later. Here he was talking specifically about being persecuted because you are a Christian.

1 Peter 3:13 And who *is* he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good?

If you were Noah, the answer might seem to be, "*About five to nine billion people!*" Notice that Peter used the word "harm," not "hurt." "Harm" means *to exasperate* or *to entreat [you] to evil*. They cannot exasperate you or entreat you to evil if you remember that God is in control and that your persecution is not something odd or unusual, but something to be expected. While it is true that people may hurt you, they cannot harm you when you understand that you are being kept spiritually by the power of God.

No matter how tough it may get, you can be "a follower of what is good." It means you can walk with God in obedience to His Word. Noah did it; *so can you!*

1 Peter 3:14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, *you are* blessed. "*And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.*"

This verse literally reads, "if you suffer... you blessed ones." The blessings come at the precise time you are suffering. God has abundant spiritual blessings to pour-out from heaven into your heart to enable you to not only *endure*, but to *excel*... And to not only *excel*, but to *evangelize*.

Instead of being "afraid of their threats" and "troubled," look at verse fifteen:

1 Peter 3:15 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;

"Sanctify" means to *reverence*. You reverence Jesus when you believe He, not your persecutors, is truly in control over all things. You reverence Him "in your hearts" means this is a spiritual transaction. You receive His sufficient grace and mercy in your suffering.

Peter's first big point is to remind you to remember that you should expect persecution. You are a pilgrim scattered in the world among the unsaved. You are in hostile enemy territory. The very least that will happen is you will be "defamed" and "reviled."

If you remember these things, you will not question your suffering. You'll quit asking God "*Why?*" or "*Why me?*" or "*Why right now?*"

Instead of wasting precious time questioning God, you will use the time of your persecution wisely. Two things will occur - one *internal*, the other *external*:

1. Internally you will be focused on Jesus. Peter described it as "the hope that is in you." It is the certainty Jesus is in control, is at work, and is coming back soon.

2. Externally you will have new ministry opportunities among your persecutors. Seeing your hope, they will want to know where it comes from and will "ask" you about it.

Instead of questioning your suffering, you are "ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you..." "Defense" is from the word where we get *apology*, but it doesn't mean saying you're sorry. It describes a reasoned defense as if you were in a court of law. You may have heard the word "apologetics." It describes a branch of theology that deals with defending the faith. That's the idea - except you need to note that Peter added an attitude when he said, "with meekness and fear." You are to remain meek towards your persecutors and have "fear" towards God. One author put it like this: You are the witness, *not the prosecuting attorney!*

There are two important prerequisites in order for you to be able to give your defense. You must have a *clear conscience* before God and you must have *correct conduct* before men.

Your clear conscience is discussed in verse sixteen:

1 Peter 3:16 having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.

"Conscience" is the internal faculty that helps you judge yourself. It either *approves* or *accuses*. Conscience may be compared to a window that lets in the light of God's Word. Conscience depends upon the light getting through. When you sin or disobey God, the window gets dirtier. If you persist, light cannot enter.

Only with a clear conscience will you have courage to give your witness to those who ask you about your hope. You'll know you are not hiding anything that could ruin your testimony. Keeping a clear conscience is how you keep yourself "ready to give a defense." Here is a quote about conscience: "Shame arises from the fear of man; conscience from the fear of God."

Your correct conduct is discussed in verse seventeen:

1 Peter 3:17 For *it is* better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

Yes, it can be "the will of God" for you to suffer persecution. Just make sure when you suffer it is because you are "doing good," *not* for doing something wrong! If you are blowing it at work... At school... At home... Then it's not persecution when unbelievers bring the hammer down on you. Conduct yourself correctly.

Instead of questioning God in your suffering, see it and seize it as an opportunity to give an answer to the unsaved of the hope that is in you. Call it "Persecution Preaching" or "Endurance Evangelism" if you need to give it a name; it is a centuries-old method God loves to employ to reveal Himself through you to the unsaved.

Speaking of the unsaved...

#2 Instead Of Questioning God's Longsuffering,
Give An Answer To Him

(v18-22)

We need to uncouple our train of thought for a moment to deal with confusion raised by these next few verses. Hold your thoughts on *Persecution Preaching* and open up some new neural pathways.

First, there is a difficult passage (in verses eighteen through twenty) that mentions Jesus somehow preaching to spirits in prison who have something to do with the days of Noah just prior to the global flood. There are at least eighteen valid theories on these verses - *not counting multitudes of whacked-out ideas!*

The best way to understand any Bible passage is to keep it in its original context. Peter has been discussing the giving of your testimony to the unsaved while you are being persecuted by them for doing good. Noah was his example. Noah preached the Gospel while he was preparing the ark. But it wasn't just Noah preaching; he was empowered by the Lord to the point where you might factually say that **Jesus was preaching through Noah**. While Noah preached and prepared, God was longsuffering, waiting one-hundred and twenty years to bring the flood. Eventually the flood came; all

those who were "disobedient" to His preaching through Noah were lost for eternity. They were, and still are, in Hades. **Their "spirits" are in the "prison" of Hades.**

These verses *do not* describe a second chance at salvation after you die; nor do they describe Jesus preaching to demons. What Peter was saying was very simple: While being persecuted by billions, Noah preached Jesus to them. They refused to repent; they rejected their Savior; they were lost for eternity and now are imprisoned in Hades awaiting the final judgment and disposition of their fate.

The second issue involve baptism. In verse twenty-one Peter said,

1 Peter 3:21 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,

Some read into this the idea that water baptism is necessary for salvation. ***Not true; never true!*** Peter quickly added that the baptism he was thinking of was not outward, "not the removal of the filth of the flesh"; it was inward, "the answer of a good conscience toward God..." Water baptism is always the outward symbol of the inward reality. "The answer of a good conscience toward God" means that, when you were baptized, you understood God had cleansed you from all sin and the guilt of sin.

OK, let's get back on board with our theme. These last few verses seem evangelical - as if addressed to any unsaved hearers in Peter's audience. He began by giving them the Gospel in a single, powerful verse:

1 Peter 3:18 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,

Jesus Christ "suffered once for sins" means He died once for all time. "Sins" is a compressed way of saying that His death was to pay the penalty for the sins of the whole world. "The just for the unjust" means He took your place and was your Substitute. You were "unjust" and deserved to die, but He - the only One Who was "just" - took your place in death. Historically speaking, Jesus was "put to death in the flesh" on the Cross at Calvary. But three days later He

was "made alive by the Spirit." He rose from the dead and is alive forevermore! All of this was God's plan from before the foundation of the earth "that He might bring us to God."

Peter preached the Gospel in the first century... **Noah preached the Gospel in his century!** He didn't have all the details, but the crowds that gathered around the ark had enough light to understand they were sinners in need of God's salvation.

Let's read verses nineteen and twenty in the context of Noah preaching to his generation:

1 Peter 3:19 by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison,
1 Peter 3:20 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.

There are many parallels between Noah's preaching, Peter's preaching, and our preaching:

1. Noah and his family were a persecuted minority; so were Peter's readers - and so are we.
2. Noah remained righteous, with a clear conscience, in the midst of a wicked generation; so could Peter's readers - and so should we.
3. Noah witnessed to those around him - being willing to suffer persecution. So could Peter's readers - and so should we.
4. Noah knew that judgment was soon to come. So did Peter's readers - and so do we.
5. God was longsuffering in the days of Noah, not willing that any should perish but that all would repent. He was longsuffering in the first century... **He remains longsuffering today.**
6. Noah was saved when judgment came. So would Peter's readers be saved from final judgment - and so shall we who believe.

In verse twenty, the phrase "were saved through water" means that Noah and his family escaped into the ark and lived. Then Peter said that their escape in the ark was an "antitype":

1 Peter 3:21 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,

Think of the word "antitype" meaning a *picture*. The global flood was real; but it is also a **picture** to illustrate your salvation. Just as the flood wiped away the old, sinful world and gave Noah and his family a fresh start, so water baptism **pictures** a complete wiping away of your past life and your new beginning. It is the outward rite that pictures the inward reality of your becoming a "new creation" in Jesus Christ. Water baptism **does not save you**; it announces to others that you are saved.

In a sense, water baptism is the equivalent of Noah getting into the ark while the unbelievers looked on. You get water baptized while unbelievers look on. Noah was safe in the ark; **you are safe in Jesus.**

The basis for your salvation is "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." He rose once-for-all from the realm of death - proving He had conquered death and could forgive us our sins. As you rise from the waters of your baptism, you are declaring to anyone watching that you are raised with Jesus never to die as a judgment for your sins.

Let me put it this way: **Water baptism is *symbolic*, not *saving*.**

Peter tied-up his thoughts in the closing verse:

1 Peter 3:22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.

Peter saw Jesus ascend into heaven; he was there. He mentions the ascension here for several reasons. Here are two of them:

1. Though you might be suffering persecution, your Lord has authority and power over all things. He therefore is aware of it and must be allowing it.
2. Through His suffering God exalted Jesus. Through your suffering you, too, can expect to be rewarded.

Conclusion

It isn't just believers who question God. The unsaved question Him. They want to know why He allows so much suffering in the world; why doesn't He do something about it.

When you question God that way, you are questioning His **longsuffering**. In the days of Noah God's "longsuffering waited." A lot of awful, perverse, injurious, terrible things happened. God waited... Because He was not willing that any should perish, but that all would come to repentance. Eventually He did do something: He destroyed the wicked.

Why doesn't God stop the suffering in the world? He will... Soon. In the mean time His longsuffering waits.

If you are unsaved, **His longsuffering waits for you!**