

Introducing the New Testament

Worksheet for Week 7

1 Peter and Revelation

This week, the worksheet introduces you to two NT books: 1 Peter and Revelation. I've combined them into this single worksheet because, though these books could hardly be more different, both are written to encourage Christians who are being persecuted. Read the introductions to the books in your study bible and, if you have one, the entries on the books in your Bible dictionary. Then read through the daily passages suggested on this worksheet.

Persecution of the Christian Church

Contrary to what many Christians believe, there was no empire-wide persecution of Christians until about 250AD. Instead, in the first centuries of the church's life, persecutions were localized and varied in intensity from time and place to place. Even the horrific persecutions of Nero in the mid-60's were limited to Rome. Still, most Christians, at one time or another, were persecuted (1) for their unwillingness to worship Caesar, and/or (2) their "anti-family" philosophy, and/or (3) their strange religious practices. Roman governors were focused on keeping the peace and because the Christians tended to stir things up, though it was not always of their own doing, they were often at odds with the authorities. Rumors and legends about the Christians' weird practices made them easy and tempting targets.

1 Peter

Writing from Rome (see "Babylon" in 5:13), in the early 60's AD, Peter encourages the Christians in Asia Minor who "have had to suffer various trials" (1:6) and are living as "aliens and exiles" (2:11). He reminds them that they are "a chosen race, a holy nation, God's own people" called to "proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (2:9). These Christians are not exiles in a literal sense; rather, as Achtemeier et al write, they are "people whose commitment to the lordship of Jesus Christ have led to transformed attitudes and behaviors that place them on the margins of respectable society. They have become victims of social ostracism, their allegiance to Christ having won for them slander, animosity, reproach, scorn, vilification, and contempt."¹ As difficult as such ostracism might be in our world, it was much more powerful in the NT world, a social world driven by status and community. In the face of these trials, Peter urges Christians to "rejoice insofar as you are sharing in Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed" (4:13). How are they to respond to their persecutors? "Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called - that you might inherit a blessing." (3:9). Note also that Peter goes so far as to instruct these believers to "Honor the Emperor." (2:17). Why do you think he would ask this of these persecuted Christians?!

Revelation

As Christians, we believe that Jesus' death and resurrection was the most important event in human history, inaugurating God's new world - a world reborn. Easter was a thunderous moment - a moment when the ages met. Every Easter we celebrate God's victory over evil, sin, and death. We celebrate new creation and the life beyond the grave!

Could any words begin to describe such events? Because our everyday language would be woefully inadequate to the task, John uses enormously provocative and fantastical word-pictures to convey the enormity of these cosmic events. He writes to encourage persecuted Christians, to show them, as powerfully as he can, that the Christian story will end well, that their own story will end well, even though the abominations of Rome make this claim seem absurd. He reminds them of the cosmic powers they battle, a battle climaxing in Jesus' victory (Chapter 19 & 20) and inaugurating the final re-creation of "a new heaven and a new earth" (21:1) where "anyone who wishes [can] take the water of life as a gift" (22:17).

¹ Achtemeier, P.J., Green, J.B., & Thompson, M.M. 2001. *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans

Bible Readings for Week 7

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage. What do you find most surprising in this letter?

<p>Day 1 1 Peter 1:1 - 2:10 The chosen people, the household of God!</p>	<p>Day 2 1 Peter 2:11 - 4:11 Living in the household of Rome</p>
<p>Day 3 1 Peter 4:12 - 5:11 Partners in suffering and glory</p>	<p>Day 4 Revelation Chapter 1 The first vision and John's commission</p>
<p>Day 5 Revelation 21 & 22 The renewal of creation, the new Jerusalem</p>	<p>Weekly Prayer Concerns</p>