

## **1 Peter 3:18-22**

Written from Rome (code name "Babylon," 5:13), this epistle exhorts Christians throughout Asia Minor to maintain the faith despite many challenges. As reflected in our text, the nature and efficacy of Jesus' suffering and death are central issues.

There were differing opinions within the early church about the significance of Christ's crucifixion. The questions: "Did Jesus really suffer?"; "Why did Jesus have to die?"; "If Jesus died for sins, is it true that every time we sin we crucify Jesus again?"; even "What did Jesus do before his resurrection?" seemed to have been often raised in the first century.

Many in the early church held to a docetic view of the divinity of Christ which denied the humanity of Jesus. This early docetism was grounded in a dualistic view of the world. It was considered impossible that a divine being would ever assume human flesh. This kind of doctrine came very early to be regarded as heretical.

The authorship of this letter has been traditionally assigned to Peter who meets the challenge head on. Yes, Jesus really did suffer and was put to death in the flesh. Furthermore he suffered for sins once and for all. He was a righteous man who suffered for the deeds of the unrighteous. Peter then gets very personal: Jesus died to bring "you" to God (v.18). Peter will not allow the argument to get too academic or theoretical. What Christians believe about the crucifixion of Jesus is very down-to-earth and very fleshly. It is important for Peter to stress the suffering of Jesus, for the Christians to whom Peter writes are suffering for their faith and need to be supported and encouraged. In suffering, the believer imitates Christ and becomes an example to the unbeliever.

This passage highlights the essentials of the story of salvation: Christ suffered and died, Christ rose again bringing the disobedient spirits along with him, Christ sits at the right hand of God. For Peter, the truth of the Gospel grounds the timid in their faith, reminds the unsure of the efficacy of baptism, and to stand firm even in the face of suffering.