

# Study 2: 1st Peter Chapter 1

## **Introduction**

Peter is writing a letter of encouragement to some Christians who are feeling neglected, and are like they are away from their homeland. To some extent, all Christians are like that. Our true homeland lies beyond this world, and we are just sojourning here on earth.

This is particularly relevant when we consider the trials and persecutions that lay in front of them. To give in to the suffering and torture might seem like a natural thing, but that would be to betray the true purchase cost of our salvation.

## **Body of the Study**

**Introduction: The Important Things**

**The Salutation**

**The Doxology**

**The Plan of Salvation**

**The Present Situation**

**God's Eternal Plan**

**A Call to Action**

**Living our Life for God**

## **Homework and preparation for next week:**

*Read the notes as a review of the study*

*Read chapter 2 in preparation for the next study*

*In this chapter, Christians are called to be different to the world. In what ways are we different? How should our behaviour be different? What things about our behaviour would make us "stand out"?*

## Notes for study 2: 1<sup>st</sup> Peter Chapter 1

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### **Introduction: The Important Things**

From the introduction and conclusion, we can glean quite a lot of information about Peter's purpose in writing the letter, and the things that he regards as important.

The primary purpose of the letter was *encouragement* (1:5:12) in spite of the fact that they were *scattered* and felt as if they were *strangers on the world* (1:1:1). They must have felt forsaken by God because they *have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials* (1:1:6), although this would only be *for a little while* (1:1:6; 1:5:10). They could be assured that in contrast to their relatively short time of suffering, we have *an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade* (1:1:5). Like the suffering that we experience, *Jesus also suffered* (1:1:11). This was according to *the prophets* and *even angels longed to understand these things*, but it was reserved for us according to the foreknowledge of God (1:1:2; 11; 12). Just as God restored Jesus in the resurrection from the dead (1:1:3), so Jesus will *restore us, and make us strong, firm and steadfast* (1:5:10) so that we are no longer *strangers in the world* (1:1:1) but *chosen* (1:5:13) by *obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkled of His blood* (1:1:2) to *the new birth into a living hope* (1:1:3).

### **The Salutation**

The letter begin with Peter giving a salutation to the brethren, reminding them that they are "...*elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father...*" (1:1:2 NKJV). Whilst they are scattered into the back-blocks of the Roman world, they are not forgotten by God. Throughout the book, God's pre-ordained plan to save mankind comes to the fore. They might be in an unimportant area of the Roman Empire, but they have been set-apart by God "...*in sanctification of the Spirit...*" (1:1:2 NKJV). As far as God is concerned, christians are His chosen people, and are in a unique position of being "the jewels in the crown" as far as He is concerned. The idea of "chosen" and "set apart" does not mean that God arbitrarily makes the choice. God pre-ordained that salvation would only come through Christ, and the *choice* in the matter is *ours* – we choose God – which Peter describes as "...*for obedience...*" and when we obey Him we are set-apart (sanctified, or "made saints") by the blood of Jesus being applied to our hearts. "...*and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ...*" (1:1:2 NKJV).

Peter reminds the brethren of the three-person nature of God, when he talks about the foreknowledge of God the Father, the sanctification of the Spirit, and the blood of Jesus Christ.

### **The Doxology**

This is a fancy word for a short word of praise to God "...*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...*" (1:1:3 NIV). Whilst the sentence continues, Peter moves straight from the doxology to reminding the brethren of God's providence for His children, which was achieved through the saving work of Christ.

Some key themes are introduced here – the new birth, our hope in Christ, and the resurrection from the dead. Our new birth in Christ comes from Christ's action of reconciling us back to God – and of course, by our obedience to Him. The new birth means that we are dead to our old life of

sin (in exactly the same way that Jesus died for our sins). We have our hearts washed clean in the blood of Jesus sacrifice, and that blood is applied when we obey Him, and are baptised into Christ (Gal 3:27) – in the same way that Christ was buried, so we are also buried with Him in baptism – baptised into His death (Rom 6:3). This symbolises our death to sin, and the sin is washed away. Just as Christ was resurrected, so we also are raised up (both out of the waters of baptism, and also at the same time out of sin and death) to walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4).

### ***The Plan of Salvation***

We have in the certainty of Jesus' resurrection, the surety of a *living hope* in our eternal salvation. Peter describes this as "...an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you..." (1:1:4 NKJV). Although Jesus died, yet he was raised from the dead. Our hope is not a dead hope, but one that reflects the living nature of Jesus who was raised from the dead, and has gone to prepare a dwelling place for us (Jn 14:1-4).

Whilst we have such a hope, God has not just been idly sitting by without being active in protecting and guiding us, as we "...are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation..." (1:1: NKJV). The word "kept" (phroureo Strongs No 5432) has the idea of "protective custody". We can see this from the 4 places that it is used in the NT – 2 Cor 11:32, where Aretas "kept" the city of Damascus with a garrison, trying to apprehend Paul; Gal 3:22, where God's people (the Jews) were "kept" under the Law to ensure that they remained faithful; and Phil 4:7 where Paul reminds the Philippians that God would "keep" their hearts and minds through Jesus Christ. In the current case, God protects us through our faith (Paul describes faith as a "shield" which offers protection from Satan's darts, in Ephesians 6:16) to enable us to achieve salvation "...kept...through faith...for salvation..." (1:1:5).

Finally in this thought, this salvation will ensure that we are "...ready to be revealed in the last time..." (1:1: NKJV).

### ***The Present Situation***

The christians clearly had an understanding of the things that Peter had been writing about, since he says "...In this you greatly rejoice..." (1:1:6 NKJV). However, they are facing (or perhaps are about to face) unpleasant persecutions "...though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials..." (1:1:6 NKJV). Peter reminds them that this is "brief" – *for a little while* – although this must be taken in comparison to our eternal salvation and our permanent home. They were *pilgrims* (1:1:1) who were away from their home.

In the face of their trials, they need to remember what is important "...These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed..." (1:1:7 NIV). Gold is purified by melting it in a furnace. The impurities melt at either a lower temperature, or a higher temperature, and are removed. In a similar way, we are purified by the trials of life. Whilst gold is regarded highly by the world, it is temporal and of no value compared to the permanency of our eternal salvation. To come straight to the application of the christians in question, they need to recognise their trials for what they are – things that will test and refine their faith – and they must not give up their eternal salvation because of the temporal and relatively short trials that they were facing.

Peter says about Christ "...whom having not seen you love..." (1:1:8 NKJV). This suggests that they might not have actually come from Jerusalem at the dispersion of Acts 8:4, as if this had been the case, then they almost certainly would have been in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover in AD 33, and witnessed the crucifixion. Despite not having actually seen Jesus, they believed the things that they had been taught about Him, "...yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory..." (1:1:8 NKJV). They knew full well where their faith would lead them "...receiving the end of your faith – the salvation of your souls..." (1:1:10 NKJV).

## **God's Eternal Plan**

Peter has reminded the brethren and led them through the consequences of their faith, to the sacrifice of Christ. The Jews could not conceive (and still can't, which is why they do not accept Jesus) of a Messiah who would die and be killed. The Jewish concept of the Messiah was two-fold. The first was the Kingly Messiah who would come and re-establish the Kingdom, ruling from Jerusalem, just like it was under David and Solomon. The second was the Priestly Messiah who would come to restore the Temple worship and Temple sacrifices. And then along comes Jesus, who was like Melchisedek – both King and Priest together (Heb 5:6; 6:20; 7:1-28).

Not only could the Jews not fathom this out, but even the Prophets who wrote the prophecies could not understand how it would be fulfilled. *"...Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow..."* (1:1:10-11 NIV).

What we can notice from this is that whilst the prophets revealed to us what was revealed to them, they did not have a full understanding of the implications of what they were writing. We can see many examples of this when we look at the NT and see how the inspired writers quote from the OT prophets. When we go back and look at the OT prophecy, and try to fathom out what it means in it's broader context, we would never put the outcome on it that has been revealed in the NT. Not all OT prophecies are like that, but many are.

Whilst many of the OT prophecies relate to events that were soon to come to pass (for example Israel being suppressed by her enemies because of their unfaithfulness), yet many of them relate to their fulfilment in Christ and the church *"...not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which have now been reported to you..."* (1:1:12 NKJV). Peter shows just how privileged we are as christians, that we are the recipients of God's eternal plan *"...things which angels desire to look into..."* (1:1:12 NKJV).

## **A Call to Action**

Peter calls the brethren to action and response *"...Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ..."* (1:1:13 NKJV). They were (or were about to) face persecution, and they needed to prepare themselves mentally to deal with it. Our true strength of character comes knowing that our relationship with Jesus is secure, and we can rest secure on that assurance.

The brethren are steered back to their new birth (1:1:3), and reminded *"...as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance..."* (1:1:14 NKJV). Like good disciplined and obedient children obey their father, so we as God's children need to obey our heavenly Father. By being born again, we have forsaken our former lives, and we must not go back there again. If we think through the implications of what these brethren were facing, they may well have faced the option of accepting emperor worship – which would put them in the situation of worshipping false gods – or death. It was a tough call, and required a tough response. The response comes from the example of God, and the sacrificial example of Jesus Christ *"...but as He who called you is holy, you also must be holy in all your conduct..."* (1:1:15 NKJV).

The true show of our colours comes from the example of how we live our lives. Our lifestyle must be different than non-christians, and we must not get caught up in worldly things. Peter reminds us about how we *"...conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning here in fear..."* (1:1:17 NKJV). God is the witness of how we live, and Peter exhorts the brethren to *"...call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work..."* (1:1:17 NKJV).

Like our true colours, we have a true assurance *"...For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect..."* (1:1:19-20 NIV). The cost of our redemption was high – in fact, the highest price that

has ever been paid for anything. This tells us a lot about the value that God places on us, that He was willing to pay such a great price (Jn 3:16).

In Jesus we see God's plan revealed "...*He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you...*" (1:1:20 NKJV). It goes without saying that God had *foreknowledge* of Jesus being revealed before the foundation of the world, and so the idea is more about revealing God's *plan* – the plan of salvation has been revealed – and it was planned even before the world itself began. The plan is that salvation comes through Christ, and His sacrifice was the means to provide it!

We should also note that Peter says that the time that they were living in was *the last time*. Some would argue that this was a reference to the recent times of Jesus life and suffering. We only need to remember that the letter was written about 30 years after the events of the cross to realise that this cannot be the context. Clearly, Peter means that with the coming of Jesus, the last age has come. This is also discussed by other NT writers (Ac 2:17; Heb 1:2; 9:26).

Peter closes the section by reminding them about the application of their faith "...*Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God...*" (1:1:21 NIV).

### **Living our Life for God**

Peter gets down to the application to practical living. He has talked about the *need* to live our lives as christians as examples to others, and now he gets down to the practicalities of *how* to do it. "...*Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart...*" (1:1:22 NIV). We need to show love towards one another as we demonstrate our love of God. The certainty of our faith comes from the certainty the God who provides it "...*For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God...*" (1:1:23 NIV).

Peter supports his comments with a quotation from Isa 40:6-8 "...*All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever.*"..." The quotation comes from Isaiah's inspired messages to an exiled and oppressed people, and is very fitting to these pilgrim christians in the face of their oppression by the pagan world.

The chapter closes with an application of Isaiah's prophecy "...*Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you...*" (1:1:25 NKJV).

Since Jesus is equivalent to the Lord in the OT, his utterances endure. So he stresses the specifically Christian application of the Isaiah prophecy. The reliable message about Jesus as proclaimed to Peter's readers gives life and transforms life so that Christians are able to love. (NIVBC)