

An Inheritance Incorruptible



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Pet. 1:1, 2; John 3:16; Ezek. 33:11; 1 Pet. 1:3–21; Lev. 11:44, 45; 1 Pet. 1:22–25.*

Memory Text: “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart” (*1 Peter 1:22, NIV*).

Whenever one studies the Bible, particularly focusing on one book or even a section of a book, a few questions need to be answered, if possible.

First, it would be good to know who the intended audience was. Second, perhaps even more important, it would be good to know what the precise reason for the writing was. What was the particular issue (if any) that the author wanted to address (such as Paul's writing to the Galatians in regard to the theological errors being taught about salvation and the law)? As we know, much of the New Testament was written as epistles, or letters, and people usually write letters in order to convey specific messages to the recipients.

In other words, as we read Peter, it would be good to know, as much as possible, the historical context of his letter. What was he saying, and why? And of course, most important of all: *What message can we (to whom, under inspiration, it was written, as well) take from it?*

And as we will soon see, even in the first few verses, Peter has a lot of important truth to reveal to us today, centuries removed from when he wrote.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 8.

To the Exiles

If you were given a piece of paper that began, “Dear Sir,” you would realize that you were reading a letter. And you would assume that the letter came from somebody you probably weren’t close to.

Just as modern letters have a standard way to begin, so do ancient letters. First Peter begins as any ancient letter would. It identifies the author and those to whom it was sent.

Read 1 Peter 1:1. What can we learn from this one verse that helps to give us a bit of context?

Peter clearly identifies himself. His name is the first word in the letter. Yet, he immediately defines himself as “an apostle of Jesus Christ.” Thus, as Paul often did (*Gal. 1:1, Rom. 1:1, Eph. 1:1*), Peter right away establishes his “credentials,” emphasizing his divine calling. He was an “apostle,” that is, “one sent,” and the One who sent him was the Lord Jesus Christ.

Peter identifies a region where his letter was directed: Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. These are all regions in Asia Minor, roughly equivalent to the part of modern Turkey east of the Bosphorus.

Debate exists about whether Peter was writing mostly to Jewish believers or to Gentile believers. The terms Peter used in 1 Peter 1:1, *sojourners/exiles* and *dispersion [diaspora]* (*NRSV*), are terms that naturally belong to Jews living outside of the Holy Land in the first century. The words *chosen* and *sanctified* in 1 Peter 1:2 are suited to both Jews and Christians alike. Describing those outside of the community as “Gentiles” (*1 Pet. 2:12, 4:3*) also underlines the Jewish character of those to whom Peter writes.

Some commentators argue, in response, that what Peter says in 1 Peter 1:18 and 4:3 would be more appropriately said to Gentile converts to Christianity than to Jewish ones. After all, would Peter really have written to Jews about the “futile ways inherited from your ancestors” (*NRSV*)? Or would he have said to Jewish readers, “For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries” (*1 Pet. 4:3, NKJV*)?

What’s more crucial for us, though, isn’t so much who the audience was but, rather, what the message says.

Elected

Read 1 Peter 1:2. What else does this tell us about those to whom Peter had been writing? What does he call them?

Whether writing to specifically Jewish or Gentile believers, Peter was sure about one thing: they were “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (*1 Pet. 1:2*).

Here, though, one needs to be careful. This does not mean that God predestined some people to be saved and some to be lost, and as good fortune would have it, the ones Peter was writing to happen to be some of those chosen or elected by God for salvation, while others were chosen by God to be lost. That’s not what the Bible teaches.

Read 1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9, John 3:16, and Ezekiel 33:11. How do these verses help us to understand what Peter meant when he called these people the “elect”?

Scripture makes it clear that it was God’s plan for everyone to be saved, a plan instituted in their behalf even before the Creation of the earth: “just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world” (*Eph. 1:4, NKJV*). “All” are “elect” in the sense that God’s original purpose was for everyone to be saved and no one to be lost. He predestined all humanity for eternal life. This means that the plan of salvation was adequate for everyone to be included in the atonement, even if not everyone would accept what that atonement offered him or her.

God’s foreknowledge of the elect is simply His knowing beforehand what their free choice would be in regard to salvation. This foreknowledge in no way forced their choice any more than a mother knowing beforehand that her child will choose chocolate cake instead of green beans meant that her foreknowledge of the choice forced the child to make it.

What kind of assurance can you get from the encouraging truth that God has chosen you to be saved?

Key Themes

Read 1 Peter 1:3–12. What is Peter’s main message in these verses?

In his greeting to his readers in 1 Peter 1:1, 2, Peter already has mentioned the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (*1 Pet. 1:2*). The three members of the Godhead form the subject of 1 Peter 1:3–12. The Father and the Son are the topic of 1 Peter 1:3–9, and the Holy Spirit is prominent in 1 Peter 1:10–12.

As he writes about the Father and Son and the work of the Holy Spirit, Peter introduces many of the themes that he will come back to.

Christians, Peter begins (*1 Pet. 1:3*; see also *John 3:7*), have been born anew. Their whole lives have been transformed by Jesus’ resurrection and the extraordinary inheritance that awaits Christians in heaven (*1 Pet. 1:3, 4*). Here, as in so many other places in the New Testament, the resurrection of Jesus is key to the Christian hope.

This hope gives Christians a reason to rejoice, despite the fact that many of those reading 1 Peter are suffering. This suffering tests and refines their faith, just as fire tests and refines gold. Even though Peter’s readers have not seen Jesus during His earthly ministry, they love Him and believe in Him. And the outcome of their faith in Him is salvation and the promise of “an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you” (*1 Pet. 1:4, NKJV*).

Peter also lets them know that the prophets of old had predicted the “grace that would come to you” (*1 Pet. 1:10*). The prophets of the Old Testament “inquired and searched” (*1 Pet. 1:10, NKJV*) about the salvation that these people were now experiencing in Jesus.

As they suffer persecution for their faith, Peter points out that they are part of a much wider conflict between good and evil. In the end, he is seeking to help them stay faithful to the truth, even amid trials.

First Peter 1:4 says that there is an inheritance “reserved in heaven for you.” Think about that on a personal level; there is a specific place reserved in heaven just for you, personally. Then how should you personally respond to this wonderful promise?

Living the Life of Salvation

Read 1 Peter 1:13–21. According to this passage, what should motivate Christian behavior?

The word *therefore*, which begins 1 Peter 1:13, NKJV, shows that what Peter will say next grows out of what he had just said. As we saw in yesterday’s study, Peter just had been talking about the grace of God and the hope that Christians have in Jesus Christ (*1 Pet. 1:3–12*).

As a result of this grace and hope, Peter urges his readers to “gird up the loins of your mind” (*1 Pet. 1:13*). That is, as a response to the salvation that they have in Jesus, they must prepare their minds in order to stand firm and be faithful (*1 Pet. 1:13*).

Read 1 Peter 1:13. What does it mean to rest your hope fully upon the grace revealed in Jesus?

No question, Peter tells them their hope rests only in Jesus. But he then emphasizes that a certain level of behavior is expected from Christians as a consequence of their salvation. He notes three of the great motivations that lie behind Christian behavior: the character of God (*1 Pet. 1:15, 16*), the coming judgment (*1 Pet. 1:17*), and the cost of redemption (*1 Pet. 1:17–21*).

The first thing that will motivate Christian behavior is the character of God. This character can be summed up this way: God is holy. Peter quotes from Leviticus 11:44, 45 when he says, “Be ye holy; for I am holy” (*1 Pet. 1:16*). Therefore those who follow Jesus must also be holy (*1 Pet. 1:15–17*).

A second motivation for Christian behavior is found in the realization that God, who is holy, will judge everyone impartially, according to what each has done (*1 Pet. 1:17*).

A third motivation arises from the great truth that Christians are redeemed. This means that they have been bought with a price, a very high price: the precious blood of Christ (*1 Pet. 1:19*). Peter emphasizes that the death of Jesus was not an accident of history but something established before the foundation of the world (*1 Pet. 1:20*).

What motivates you to be a Christian? What would you answer, and why, if someone asked you, *Why are you a Christian?* Bring your answers to class on Sabbath.

Love One Another

Peter next steers Christians to the ultimate expression of what living a holy and faithful life will be like.

Read 1 Peter 1:22–25. What crucial point is he making here about what it means to be a Christian?

Peter’s starting point is that Christians are already purified (“Seeing ye have purified . . .”) and are living in obedience to the truth (*1 Pet. 1:22*). The verb “purify” or “cleanse” is closely related to the words *holy* and *holiness*, which link back to what Peter wrote a few verses earlier (*1 Pet. 1:15*). Through their commitment to Jesus, and through their baptism (*compare 1 Pet. 3:21, 22*), Christians have purified themselves by setting themselves aside for God, and they do this by obeying the truth.

This change in their lives results in another change. They now find themselves in a close relationship with others who share a similar worldview. These relationships are so close that Peter uses the language of family to describe them. Christians are to act out of brotherly and sisterly love. The Greek word *philadelphia* used in 1 Peter 1:22, when he talks about the “love of the brethren,” means literally “love of brother/sister.” It is the love that families have for one another.

There are several different words in Greek that are translated “love”: *philia* (friendship), *eros* (the passionate love of a husband and wife), *agape* (a pure love that seeks the good of the other). The word Peter uses when he writes “love one another fervently” (*1 Pet. 1:22, NKJV*) is linked to *agape*—which usually means the pure love that seeks the good of others. That’s certainly why he added the phrase to love one another “with a pure heart” (*1 Pet. 1:22, NKJV*), the kind of heart that comes from being “born again” (*1 Pet. 1:23; see also 1 Pet. 1:3*) through the incorruptible Word of God. This kind of love comes only from God; it’s not what a selfish, self-centered, unregenerate heart will manifest, which is surely why Peter puts such an emphasis on being purified and on “obeying the truth” (*1 Pet. 1:22*). The truth is not just something believed; it must be lived.

How can we learn to be more loving? What choices must we make in order to be able to manifest the kind of love that comes from a “pure heart”?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Christ the Way of Life,” pp. 365–368; “Perfect Obedience Through Christ,” pp. 373–376, in *Selected Messages*, book 1.

It’s amazing how rich and deep this first chapter of Peter is and how much ground it covers. Peter begins his epistle with a meditation on the character of the Godhead, bringing in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father has provided a Savior in His Son, Jesus Christ, and we are elected in Him for sanctification and obedience. We come to love Jesus, and in Him we rejoice with exalted joy because, through His death and resurrection, we have the promise of an “inheritance incorruptible” in heaven. Even amid trials, then, we can rejoice greatly in the salvation offered us in Christ. “His [Peter’s] letters were the means of reviving the courage and strengthening the faith of those who were enduring trial and affliction, and of renewing to good works those who through manifold temptations were in danger of losing their hold upon God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 517. Meanwhile, the Holy Spirit worked through the prophets to describe the days in which Peter and his readers live. As a consequence, Christians should live holy lives, filled with obedience to the truth, in communities that are characterized by the kind of love that comes from a “pure heart.”

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, go over your answers to the question at the end of Wednesday’s study: What motivates us to be Christians? What do your answers share in common? How do they diverge?
- 2 Twice in this first chapter (*1 Pet. 1:3, 21*), Peter brought up the resurrection of Jesus. What is it about the Resurrection that is so crucial to our faith?
- 3 Peter talked about an “inheritance incorruptible” (*see also Dan. 7:18*). What does that mean? Think about all the things in this world and this life that fade away or that can be destroyed instantly. What should this tell us about how wonderful our promised inheritance really is?
- 4 How can our faith grow amid trials? That is, what choices can we make to help us to learn from the things we suffer?