

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?

The Canceled Funeral: Part 2

Everyone in the room heard One-Ojo sneeze, too, and they ran outside terrified. I continued praying, and One-Ojo opened her eyes. She struggled to free herself from the ropes that bound her. I called her brother to come and untie the burial ropes.

When her brother saw One-Ojo struggling, he began shaking with fear. But I urged him to untie his sister. When she was freed, we helped her to a chair. The mourners who had fled now crowded around the doorway and windows to see the dead girl who was now alive.

One-Ojo asked for food, and someone brought it to her. Soon her strength returned, and we praised God together. Then I told the family that God had healed their daughter in answer to prayer, but that God was not willing to share His glory with witchcraft. I warned them not to put herbs on One-Ojo according to their custom, for this was a form of witchcraft, and it would not please God. The girl's mother and brother nodded in agreement.

It was dark when I returned to my room. My legs were shaking, and I felt weak and exhausted. I knelt down and prayed, "God, today my 'Thomas prayer' has been answered. I believe. Use me as You will. I'm Yours." Then I fell into bed and slept soundly.

About one o'clock in the morning, a loud knock at my door woke me. "Pastor Larie, come!" a woman's voice begged. I opened the door and found One-Ojo's mother standing there. "Come!" she begged. "One-Ojo is dead again."

"How can that be?" I asked. "God's power never fails." I hurried with her to where One-Ojo lay on her bed. I checked her pulse and her breathing. She was dead—again. As I knelt down beside her, I smelled the witch doctor's herbs that someone had spread on her body.

"Who put those herbs on her body?" I asked. One-Ojo's mother said that her husband must have done it, for he was the only other person in the house.

"God raised her from the dead," I said, "and He deserves the glory for her resurrection. But someone has dishonored God and applied these herbs to her, and now she is dead again!"

I turned and prayed as the family waited silently. A few minutes later One-Ojo opened her eyes and sat up. I stayed with her a few minutes. Then before I returned home, I warned the family again not to allow anyone to touch her body with the witch doctor's herbs. Her mother and brother nodded vigorously. Then I went home and fell into bed, exhausted.

To be continued in next week's Inside Story.

The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Texts:** *1 Peter 1:3–9, 13–21*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: Realize that in Christ believers are born again into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Feel: Experience the joy of salvation.

Do: Live as part of God’s covenant people, called by God to lives of faith, hope, love, and holiness.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The New Birth Into a Living Hope

A What does it mean to be born again through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead?

B What is implied by being a part of God’s covenant community, called to holiness?

II. Feel: No Longer Aliens but Born Into the Household of God

A How does it feel to be an alien rather than a member of a household or community?

B How have we experienced the joy of receiving the goal of our faith—the salvation of our souls?

III. Do: Living as Members of the Covenant Community

A What qualities does Peter commend to those who are called to be members of the new covenant community of faith?

B What motivation does Peter provide for living lives of holiness and reverent fear?

▶ **Summary:** Peter reminds his readers—who are strangers scattered in the world—that they are in continuity with the Old Testament people of God, having been redeemed from their futile ways of life and born again to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus. Therefore, they should behave like members of the community of faith in view of the judgment coming at Christ’s return.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *1 Peter 1:3–5*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Through God’s mercy, we have received a new birth, leading to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This hope promises us an imperishable, undefiled, and unfading inheritance. God has reserved it in heaven for us who have been preserved by His power through faith for a salvation that is soon to be revealed at Christ’s return. We find great joy in this hope, even when we experience various trials. The development of our characters in and through these trials will result in praise, glory, and honor to God when Christ is revealed.

Just for Teachers: It seems evident that Peter writes in 1 Peter 1:1 to people who are scattered through the provinces of Asia Minor, either as a result of persecution or through purposeful resettlement by the Roman authorities. In either case, they would have been dispossessed of their homes and have felt like aliens among strange peoples. Such people need hope in an inheritance that is enduring. Peter offers such hope to his readers.

Opening Activity and Discussion: Have the class read Psalm 64. Discuss the setting in which this psalm of David is apparently written and how Peter’s readers might have identified with David’s sense of isolation and desire for hope and salvation from God. Encourage the class members to recall times they may have felt similar disenfranchisement from their communities and a desire for hope in God and His salvation. What Bible promises have provided hope and joy at such times?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Commentator Karen H. Jobes argues rather convincingly in favor of a program of Roman colonization under Emperor Claudius as a plausible explanation for Peter’s description of his addressees as “strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (*1 Pet. 1:1*). “The entire book of 1 Peter is both framed [*1 Pet. 1:1; compare with 1 Pet. 5:13*] and saturated with the terms of exile and foreignness.”—*1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), p. 39. If this theory is correct, the believers whom Peter addresses may not have had Roman citizenship to protect them from what was most likely coerced

exile and disenfranchisement in the interest of populating the emperor's newly established colonies in Asia Minor. Peter's description of their state as having been "chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" and "birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (*1 Pet. 1:2, 3, NIV*) points them to God's ultimate purpose for their situation. They are to live as foreigners and strangers in the earth, for their inheritance is "reserved in heaven for you . . . a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (*1 Pet. 1:4, 5, NASB*).

Bible Commentary

I. Chosen by God's Foreknowledge (*Review 1 Peter 1:1, 2 with your class.*)

Peter addresses the recipients of his first letter by reminding them that although they are aliens in the provinces where they are currently residing, God has selected them according to His divine foreknowledge. They have been set apart by the Spirit of God for a special purpose, namely, for obedience and for being sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ. The latter seems to be an allusion to the establishment of the Mosaic covenant in which the people pledged obedience to the covenant. The covenant was then ratified by sprinkling the blood of the sacrifice on the people (*see Exod. 24:3–8*). Peter then expresses for his readers a wish for grace and peace to be with them in full measure.

Consider This: In what ways might we be considered aliens in this world? (*See Heb. 11:9, 10, 13–16.*) How do we demonstrate our calling and status by our lifestyles?

II. Begotten Again to a Living Hope (*Review 1 Peter 1:3–9 with your class.*)

New life begins with a new conception. This life comes from God's mercy for undeserving sinners. The result for the believer is a living hope, which derives from Jesus' own resurrection from the dead. This hope is grounded in an inheritance that is reserved in heaven for those who are protected by God's power through faith. It climaxes in a salvation that is ready to be revealed at the return of Christ on the last day. Such a hope produces great joy in the believer despite various trials that put faith to the test, and it will result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Indescribable joy is the experience of all who will attain the goal of their faith: the salvation of their souls.

Consider This: How may I experience the hope and joy of one who has been born again? What are the evidences of this in my life?

III. The Gospel Proclaimed by the Prophets (*Review together 1 Peter 1:10–12.*)

The Old Testament prophets predicted the grace that would come to Peter's readers by the suffering of Jesus Christ and His subsequent glorification at His resurrection and ascension. They would have liked to understand these matters better themselves, but they were informed that in their prophetic ministry they were serving not themselves but the believers represented by Peter's readers who would come afterward. So, the good news that they proclaimed was not fully understood by them—or even by angels. But now that Christ has come, the gospel of grace is more fully grasped by Peter's readers than it ever was by the prophets, despite the fact that they had the Spirit of Christ in them (*1 Pet. 1:11*).

Consider This: How does this proclamation of grace apply to us, Peter's readers, today? How may we understand Peter's words to apply even more to our situations today than to his own day?

IV. The Call to Holy Living (*Review 1 Peter 1:13–25 with your class.*)

Peter's readers have been ransomed by the precious blood of Jesus from the empty way of life they inherited from their ancestors. In view of this fact, Peter appeals to them to prepare their minds for action by being fully sober and setting their hopes completely on the grace that will be brought to them at the revelation (visible return) of Jesus Christ. They are called to be holy in all of their conduct, because God, who called them, is holy. They need to live in conscious awareness of the coming judgment, with due respect for the Father, who judges impartially according to each one's work (*1 Pet. 1:17*). This consciousness implies that they will show sincere mutual love out of a pure heart, because they have been born again through the living and enduring Word of God.

Ellen G. White observes, "God has commanded us, 'Be ye holy; for I am holy;' and an inspired apostle declares that without holiness 'no man shall see the Lord.' Holiness is agreement with God. By sin the image of God in man has been marred and well-nigh obliterated; it is the work of the gospel to restore that which has been lost; and we are to cooperate with the divine agency in this work."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 743.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Unless one has something to live for in the future, what motivates one's present course of action?
- ② What value does Peter place on the inheritance he holds out before his readers?
- ③ What value does Peter place on the readers themselves, based on the price paid

for their redemption? What obligation does this price, in turn, place upon Peter's readers?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Remind the class of the experiences of other biblical characters—such as Abraham, Joseph, David, and Daniel—who went through the experience of being foreigners in a strange land and who learned to rely on the promises of God for an inheritance that yet lay in the future. Have the class read together Hebrews 11:8–10, 13–16, and discuss the attitude that instilled faith and hope in the patriarchs. Compare our own situation, as alluded to in Hebrews 11:39, 40.

Thought Questions:

- ❶ What is the essence of the gospel announced by the Old Testament prophets and proclaimed by the Holy Spirit?
- ❷ What are some of the ways in which you are conscious of the price paid to ransom us from our empty ways of life? What difference does this knowledge make in how we live?
- ❸ In what ways do we experience the joy of our salvation on a daily basis?

Activity: Take a few minutes to share testimonies regarding the hope that class members experience as a result of having found the joy of salvation in Christ.

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Many find it difficult to know how to witness to others of the hope and joy of salvation. First, one needs to experience that hope and joy in a meaningful way. It may be helpful to practice sharing with one another before attempting to share with strangers. The Sabbath School class is an opportunity to practice sharing until one is comfortable knowing what to do and say.

Activity: Provide opportunity for class members to gain experience in witnessing for their faith by creating a role-playing situation in which members witness to one another as if to people in the community. Begin with experienced members, modeling witnessing activities; then encourage others to emulate their examples until they gain confidence.