

JUAN R. SANCHEZ  
**1 PETER  
FOR YOU**



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## **1 Peter For You**

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## SERIES PREFACE

Each volume of the *God's Word For You* series takes you to the heart of a book of the Bible, and applies its truths to your heart.

The central aim of each title is to be:

- Bible centered
- Christ glorifying
- Relevantly applied
- Easily readable

You can use *1 Peter For You*:

**To read.** You can simply read from cover to cover, as a book that explains and explores the themes, encouragements and challenges of this part of Scripture.

**To feed.** You can work through this book as part of your own personal regular devotions, or use it alongside a sermon or Bible-study series at your church. Each chapter is divided into two shorter sections, with questions for reflection at the end of each.

**To lead.** You can use this as a resource to help you teach God's word to others, both in small-group and whole-church settings. You'll find tricky verses or concepts explained using ordinary language, and helpful themes and illustrations along with suggested applications.

These books are not commentaries. They assume no understanding of the original Bible languages, nor a high level of biblical knowledge. Verse references are marked in **bold** so that you can refer to them easily. Any words that are used rarely or differently in everyday language outside the church are marked in **gray** when they first appear, and are explained in a glossary towards the back. There, you'll also find details of resources you can use alongside this one, in both personal and church life.

Our prayer is that as you read, you'll be struck not by the contents of this book, but by the book it's helping you open up; and that you'll praise not the author of this book, but the One he is pointing you to.

*Carl Laferton, Series Editor*



## FOREWORD

One of the greatest truths of Christianity is that God has graciously revealed himself to us. As the late Carl F.H. Henry said, in Scripture God “forfeits his own personal privacy that his creatures might know him.” This is only one of the reasons why regular Bible study is essential in the life of the Christian. Books like the one that you are holding in your hand, which aid Christians in unfolding the riches of Scripture, are an important resource in the life of the church and for the sanctification of God’s people.

The apostle Peter himself understood this truth well. Even though he spent three years with the Lord Jesus Christ, throughout his ministry he affirmed the centrality of Scripture in the Christian life. Peter says in 2 Peter 1:19, for instance, that we would “do well to pay attention” to the “prophetic word” of Scripture, since it is a “lamp shining in a dark place.” Thus, our dependence upon the Bible is clear, and the importance of affirming the total inspiration and truthfulness of the Bible is apparent. Affirming the authority and infallibility of the Bible is not merely a matter of articulating a high view of Scripture. The affirmation of the Bible’s centrality for our spiritual growth is essential for believers.

This is particularly important to remember as we approach books like 1 Peter, which contains a number of hard truths. One of the recurring themes of 1 Peter is that Christians will endure suffering, and Peter teaches us that this suffering gives us unique opportunities to glorify God. Of course, Peter is only faithfully passing down what he learned from the Lord Jesus, who did not promise his followers a life of ease and comfort. Jesus issued a call to discipleship that warned of dangers ahead: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). Jesus is not looking for mere believers, though belief is the first command. Christ has called for those who believe in him to serve him and follow him and obey him—even to take up our own cross as his disciples.

Peter also reminds us of these same realities. Christians will “suffer for righteousness’ sake,” but in return we “will be blessed” as we follow the Lord Jesus (1 Peter 3:14). Similarly in 4:12, Peter writes, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.” In other words, Christians should expect trials and tribulations in this life. This is not just the testimony of Jesus and Peter. Paul himself taught the same thing in 2 Timothy 3:12: “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

But this is not a cause for despair for Christians, because as followers of Christ we have set our affections on things above and not on the things of this world. As Peter says, when we suffer we can “rejoice,” because we are sharing in “Christ’s sufferings” as we await the day when “his glory is revealed” (1 Peter 4:13). Or as Jesus himself said, “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven” (Matthew 5:11-12).

The Christian life is not characterized by comfort but by warfare and trial. Yet even in the midst of these difficulties, we have the hope of a better country that Christ has purchased for us. Further, we have the example of Christ himself, who suffered for us and died for us so that we might be reconciled to God (1 Peter 3:18).

When it comes to suffering and the difficulties that accompany being a disciple of Jesus, no superficial answer will do. We will either take our stand with God’s self-revelation in the Bible, or we are left to invent our own insufficient answers. In this letter God, through the apostle Peter, shows us how to glorify him and walk in a manner worthy of the gospel even in the midst of suffering and discouragement. He also gives us great hope for the inheritance that awaits us. We may suffer “a little while,” but “the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you” (5:10).

Books like the one you are holding are a needed resource in the life of the church. Juan Sanchez is a pastorally sensitive, theologically sound and thoughtful expositor of Scripture. I am thankful for his careful and rich treatment of 1 Peter and for his ability to take hard theological truths and make them accessible to everyone. As you encounter the message of 1 Peter, may your soul be strengthened for the challenges of following Christ in a fallen world as we seek to glorify God together. And in the end, may we all be able to say with Peter, "To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen" (5:11).

*R. Albert Mohler, Jr.*  
*President of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary*



## INTRODUCTION TO 1 PETER

Here is a letter written to churches like ours, about a time such as ours. Peter's first letter is one we need to read, treasure and believe in our day, because the post-Christian societies many of us live in now are very much like the pre-Christian society in which Peter's first-century readers lived then. Here is a letter for today.

Like the Christians in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) to whom Peter was writing, most of us don't face universal, state-sponsored persecution at this time—but we are encountering the reality of increasing hostility toward anything Christian. While we may live under the rule of governments that offer some legal protections for Christians, Christianity is no longer generally accepted, nor deemed acceptable. In such a context, believers may not necessarily face imprisonments, torture or executions; however, we do face a progressively intolerant culture in which we are likely to be discriminated against simply because we identify with Christ.

For many of us who are accustomed to living in “Christian nations,” this is a new reality that we need to get used to, as churches and as individuals. But suffering for being a Christian was not new for Peter's readers—it was normal. We need Peter to teach us how to face the reality that following Christ and obeying what he commands makes us different—we are aliens and strangers in a foreign land. We need to learn how to endure unjust suffering in a society where Christianity is unwelcome. We need to learn how to live with joy and hope and love when we are mocked and maligned and misunderstood because of what we believe and how we live. And in order to do that, we need to be reminded of the true grace of God in which we can stand firm.

Here is a letter written to churches like ours, about a time such as ours.

The truth is that around the world today, many do face death for their beliefs: Jonathan Merrit explained in the Religion News Service in early 2015 that...

“Christian persecution reached historic levels in 2014, with approximately 100 million Christians around the world facing possible dire consequences for merely practicing their religion, according to the [Open Doors ‘World Watch List’ report] ... From imprisonment to torture to beheadings, more Christians worldwide live in fear for their lives than at any [other] time in the modern era.”

We may not be suffering in this way (yet)—but living publicly for and speaking publicly of Christ will nevertheless bring lower-level, less life-threatening, but no less unwelcome, trials and griefs.

The truth is that simply by virtue of our identity with Christ, Christians will suffer. Jesus reminded his disciples, “If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (John 15:19). After having been stoned and left for dead at Lystra, the apostle Paul and Barnabas “returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:21-22). Paul told Timothy that “indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12). Peter is not saying anything different than the rest of Scripture when he tells us in this letter that we should “not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you” (1 Peter 4:12).

Today, perhaps we do see painful trials as a surprise—perhaps we have grown used to an era when it has been possible to be simultaneously comfortable, and culturally acceptable, and Christian. If that time ever truly existed, it is now certainly passing. Peter will help us to prepare our “minds for action”—literally, to gird up the loins of our minds—to endure discomfort and hostility with joy, understanding

and even rejoicing that “to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps” (2:21).

## The Author

For a variety of reasons, many recent scholars doubt that the apostle Peter wrote 1 Peter. I would encourage those interested to consult the appropriate resources. (Two good places to start are “1 Peter” in *A New Testament Introduction to the New Testament* by D. A. Carson, & Douglas Moo; and pages 14-19 of *1 Peter* by Karen Jobes, in the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament Series.) For myself, I will assume what the letter claims for itself—that “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ” (1:1) wrote (or dictated) this first letter bearing his name. Here, there is only space briefly to outline two reasons why I agree with Carson and Moo when they conclude, “The case against Petrine authorship is ... not at all a strong one.”

First, throughout the letter, the author shows great familiarity with Jesus’ teaching, life, ministry, death, resurrection and exaltation—things of which Peter himself had first-hand knowledge. The letter reads as though it were written by someone who knew Jesus very well.

Second, if Peter is the author, then the letter would have to have been written sometime in the early AD 60s, toward the end of Peter’s life, when he was likely in Rome (that is, “Babylon,” 5:13). One of the reasons some deny that Peter is the author is because they claim that the letter was written during a time of universal, empire-wide persecution, such as that of the emperor Domitian (AD 81-96) or Trajan (AD 98-117). If that were the case, clearly Peter would have been dead by then. But, as we will see, the letter does not give evidence of such organized and intense persecution. Instead, it describes a time when Christian persecution was more localized and sporadic. It was written during a time when Christians were being persecuted simply because of their faith, because they were different than everyone else. They did not worship the Roman gods; they rejected the sexual promiscuity of

their day; they had strange worship practices; and they even tried to win people over to their God and their way of life. Because Christians were different, some government officials were likely to discriminate against them (2:13-17); because Christians were different, their employers might treat them harshly (2:18-25); because Christians were different, a non-Christian husband might reject his Christian wife (3:1-7); because Christians were different, they were not yet losing their lives, but they were losing out. All this argues that it is perfectly possible—probable, even—that this letter was written before the organized state persecution of Christians—and therefore well within Peter’s own lifetime, rather than after it.

### **Standing Firm and Staying Joyful**

In this context of ongoing discrimination and ridicule for their faith, Peter writes the Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor to remind them that all Christians have been called to suffer just as Christ has suffered (2:21); therefore, “the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world” (5:9).

But Peter does not merely remind them of the reality of suffering; he encourages them by reminding them of the “true grace of God” (5:12)—they are God’s people, chosen by the Father and set apart by the Holy Spirit for salvation through the blood of Christ (1:2). And during their exile on this earth, they await the return, or revelation, of Christ, when final salvation will be revealed (1:5), and they will receive their imperishable inheritance (1:4). This is the true grace of God (5:12).

By sharing these truths with his first readers, Peter hoped that they would be able to face with great joy the ridicule and shame this world brought upon them, standing firm in the knowledge that their vindication was coming at the revelation of Christ. It is my hope and prayer that as you enjoy the truths and challenges of his letter, you too will be inspired and equipped to stand firm in that same knowledge.

# 1. ELECT EXILES

In more and more places throughout the world it is becoming increasingly difficult to live as a Christian. Ministries like The Voice of the Martyrs or Open Doors tell us that each month:

“322 Christians are killed for their faith; 214 churches and church properties are destroyed; 722 forms of violence are committed against Christians (such as beatings, abductions, rapes, arrests, and forced marriage).” ([www.opendoorusa.org](http://www.opendoorusa.org))

Some parts of the New Testament, like Revelation, are addressed to believers in that situation. But Peter’s first letter is not. There is no evidence in 1 Peter that the Christians in Asia Minor experienced martyrdom, nor organized, state-sponsored, empire-wide persecution. Peter wrote to Christians scattered through modern-day Turkey (**1:1\***), who experienced sporadic mistreatment and abuse, ridicule and shame, simply and only because they identified with Christ. As a new **sect**<sup>†</sup>, Christians seemed to threaten the very fabric of the religion and culture of both Roman and Jewish societies. They refused to worship the gods of their culture; they had an exclusive message of salvation; they had odd customs and practices; and they believed in a God who became a man and who, rather than triumph and establish his kingdom as expected, had been killed, only to rise again (they claimed) from the dead. The Christians to whom Peter wrote were exiles in the world they once called their own.

This backdrop should sound familiar to most of us. In our own day it is becoming increasingly difficult to live as a Christian. It feels more and

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\* All 1 Peter verse references being looked at in each chapter are in **bold**.

† Words in **gray** are defined in the Glossary (page 179).

more that we're exiles in a world we once called our own. Our culture seems to misunderstand us more and more, and to malign and mock us more and more. And as we work through 1 Peter together, what we will see is that this is not strange. Those who desire to live godly lives in this world will be persecuted. Christian suffering is normal.

And so 1 Peter is a letter we desperately need to read, and wrestle with, and believe today. In these hardening times, some of us will be tempted to compromise what we believe in order to "fit in" or to avoid suffering, while others of us will be tempted to bemoan all that is wrong with our world and long nostalgically for a better time, long-forgotten (and that likely never actually existed). Peter will equip us to stand firm against both temptations as we look forward to a better future. Peter will repeatedly remind us that in spite of our status as exiles in this world, we have a secure standing before a **sovereign** and faithful God who will **vindicate** his **covenant** people on the last day. Peter will give us what we need to "stand firm" (5:12).

## **Authoritative Reassurance**

Peter introduces himself as "an apostle of Jesus Christ" (1:1). While "apostle" simply means "one who is sent," Peter identifies his apostleship with Jesus Christ. He is one who is sent out by Jesus. More specifically, Peter is one of a dozen men who walked with Jesus and witnessed his life, ministry, miracles, death, and resurrection (Acts 1:12-26). These men were sent out by Jesus as witnesses to his resurrection in order to announce the good news of salvation (Acts 1:8).

Peter—*Petros*, meaning "rock"—is the name Jesus gave to Simon the fisherman (Matthew 16:17-18; 4:18). Peter, along with the other apostles, is the foundation of the church. It is on the truth of who Jesus is, revealed to these living witnesses, that Jesus is building his church (1 Peter 2:4-8; see also Matthew 16:18-19 and Ephesians 2:19-22). So Peter writes with a unique authority: as an eyewitness who is able to confirm all that the Old Testament prophesied about

Jesus (2 Peter 1:16-21). His reassurances to us will be real because he speaks with authority—the authority of the risen King.

## Exiles in a Strange Land

By calling the recipients of his letter the “**elect** exiles of the **Dispersion**” (1 Peter **1:1**), and concluding the letter with a greeting from “**Babylon**” (5:13), Peter is deliberately identifying his readers with Old Testament Israel in Babylonian captivity during their exile from their homeland. That does not mean he is writing only to Jews. In fact, there are several clues throughout the letter that lead us away from this conclusion:

- Peter speaks of his audience as being “ransomed from the futile ways inherited from *your* forefathers” (1:18, my italics). This is not the way a Jewish background believer would speak of their own, Jewish heritage—Peter, who was himself Jewish, does not include himself in this description.
- He acknowledges that the **Gentiles** “are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery” (4:4). Apparently, Peter’s readers once participated in this Gentile debauchery before coming to faith in Christ.

So why does Peter use this Old Testament language of dispersion, exile, and Babylon? Because he wants his readers to see that, like Israel in Babylonian exile, Christians now live in the world they once belonged to as “exiles” (**1:1**) and as “**sojourners**” (2:11). We do not belong here, and we are not to; we are just passing through.

Our identification with Christ is what makes us strangers in this world. Jesus himself had told Peter, “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you ... I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (John 15:18-19). Exiles... sojourners... hated... those are strong terms. We are foreigners in a hostile land, a people presently living in exile, away from our homeland and dispersed throughout the world.

We need to recognize how strange we are to those in this world who do not know Christ. We worship only one God (1 Peter 1:15-21); they worship false gods or no god at all. We live our lives under a divinely revealed moral standard; they live their lives under their own personal moral standards, oftentimes “living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry” (4:3). This is the reality in which Christians have always lived; this is the reality we Christians live in today. Because of our identity with Christ, we are strangers in a world that is filled with those who are driven by “the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions” (1 John 2:16, see ESV footnote). As we faithfully follow Christ, we will stand out as different, even strange. Therefore, the world will hate us. Peter recognized that the Christians in Asia Minor were suffering because they identified themselves as followers of Jesus Christ, and he writes to encourage them by reminding them that in the face of such suffering, they can stand firm in the true grace of God (1 Peter 5:12). So can we, and so must we.

## Chosen People

Crucially, Peter’s readers are not merely exiles; they are “elect” exiles (1:1). Like the reference to “exiles of the Dispersion,” the reference to God’s elect also points back to Israel. Like Israel, who were God’s chosen people under the **old covenant** (see Deuteronomy 7:6-8), Peter’s readers, the **new covenant** people of God, are a people related to God because of his divine choice. Peter will unpack this idea later in the letter (1 Peter 2:9), but here he begins to encourage his readers by explaining the grounds and purpose of their election.

First, Christians are elect or chosen “according to the foreknowledge of God” (1:2), not according to any intrinsic value or qualities we may or may not possess. Thankfully, God does not choose as we would choose. Rather, God sets his love on those whom the world is likely to reject. The basis of our election is God’s foreknowledge. When Peter uses the word foreknowledge, he doesn’t just mean that

God foresaw who would respond to his offer of salvation in faith. “Foreknow-ledge” has covenant implications. Foreknowledge indicates that God freely chose to set his covenant love on certain individuals before the creation of the world, and **foreordained** that those whom he foreknew would come to salvation at the appointed time. So Peter uses the same word when speaking of Jesus Christ being “foreknown before the foundation of the world” (v 20). God the Father was in intimate relation with Jesus, his Son, before the foundation of the world and foreordained that at the appointed time the Son would be revealed in order to accomplish the salvation that was planned from all eternity.

Talking about God’s sovereign choice in salvation can be intimidating or difficult. After all, how can the idea of God choosing people for salvation be comforting? Yet Peter encouraged his readers with the **doctrine** of divine election—because it reminded the Christians in Asia Minor that their suffering did not mean God had forgotten them. We too have the tendency to believe that God is with us and blessing us when all is well, while wondering if God has somehow abandoned us when our world is falling apart. Regardless of how bad our circumstances may appear, God is sovereign, and he is the one who has known us intimately from before the foundation of the world. And because God has chosen us, we belong to God, and no amount of suffering can separate us from the inheritance he has prepared for us (3:13-14).



If before the creation of the world God chose you, he is hardly going to let you go now!

We can stand firm in the grace of God because the God who chooses us is the God who brings about the very salvation he offers. If before the creation of the world God chose you, and if he sent his Son to die for you, he is hardly going to let you go now!

## Saved by the Trinity

In beautiful, divine harmony, the **triune** God secures and accomplishes our great salvation. So, the salvation for which we have been chosen in eternity past by the Father is brought about in our experience by the work of the Holy Spirit on the basis of the Son's sacrificial death on our behalf.

The Spirit "sanctifies" those whom the Father has chosen for "obedience to Jesus Christ" and "for sprinkling with his blood" (1:2). The word translated "sanctification" means "set apart for" or "dedicated to." While often in Scripture "sanctification" refers to the ongoing, **progressive** work of the Spirit to conform Christians to the image of Christ, in this instance it indicates how someone comes to be a part of the people of God: they are set apart by the Holy Spirit.

Peter explains that Christians are set apart "for obedience." Again, the word "obedience" coupled with "sanctification" can point to the Spirit's progressive work in the believer, but throughout his letter, Peter uses the words "obey" and "obedience" as the initial obedience (saving faith) to the truth of the gospel (1:22; 3:1, 20; 4:17). (The apostle Paul uses obedience in this way too at times—see 2 Thesalonians 1:8). The elect of God, then, are set apart by the Holy Spirit so that they obey the gospel—repent of their sin and trust in Christ. But of course, this initial obedience frees us to continue obeying Jesus during the time of our exile.

The Holy Spirit has also set us apart "for sprinkling with [Jesus'] blood" (1 Peter 1:2). This language points back to the covenant when God set Israel apart as his people (see Exodus 19 – 24). At **Mount Sinai**, God told **Moses** to set apart Israel as God's covenant people by sprinkling the blood of sacrificed animals on the people. Moses "took the blood and threw it on the people and said, 'Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words'" (Exodus 24:8).

So in 1 Peter 1:2, Peter is encouraging Christians by reminding us that we are the new covenant people of God. In election, the Father

set his covenant love on us before the creation of the world. By his sacrificial death, the Son established a new and better covenant. This new and better covenant promised to establish an intimate relationship between God and a people who would not only be forgiven and cleansed from sin; they would also be empowered to obey God because they would possess new hearts and God's indwelling Spirit (see Ezekiel 36:25-27 and Jeremiah 31:33-34). We enter into this new covenant as the gospel is preached and the Holy Spirit sets us apart to obey the invitational command of the gospel: repent and believe. Here is the great salvation planned, accomplished, and applied by the triune God. Every member of the Trinity was involved in saving you! The Father elects a people for salvation; the Son accomplishes their salvation; and the Spirit applies that salvation to all who believe the gospel. Praise be to God!

While living in a world hostile to us because of our Christian faith—in a world where things are always uncertain and where to live by faith is increasingly risky—we need to remember our secure standing before God. Regardless of our circumstances, we can stand firm in the grace of the God who chose us before creation and brought us to himself through the setting apart of the Spirit for conversion. Have you turned away from your sin and trusted in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation? If so, then you have nothing to fear, for the very fact that you have believed the gospel is evidence of your election. And you will endure suffering for your faith if and as you stand firm in this grace. Not only this, but you will enjoy peace as you endure that suffering. This is the “grace and peace” that Peter prayed would be multiplied to the suffering Christians (1 Peter **1:2**), and that I pray will be multiplied to us as we travel through this world as “elect exiles.”

## Questions for reflection

1. Are you more naturally a “compromiser” or a “bemoaner” (see page 16)? How might you need to challenge yourself?
2. Did the description of Christians as “elect exiles” comfort you, discomfort you, or both? How?
3. What particularly thrilled you as you considered how the triune God has saved you?

## PART TWO

How do we respond to the news of such amazing grace in the saving work of the triune God applied to people like us? Praise! At least, that should be our immediate response—not merely to understand the first two verses, but to worship God because of them. And that’s what Peter leads his readers to do. Having acknowledged the reality that the Christians in Asia Minor are exiles sojourning in a hostile world, and having rooted their standing in God’s predetermined love for them in election, Peter leads his readers to praise “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” for this great salvation (1 Peter **1:3**).

Verses 3-13 are one long sentence in the Greek, but the main clause is “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (**v 3**). The remainder of the sentence continues to show us why God is worthy of our praise. In **verses 3-5**, Peter reminds his readers that God is worthy of praise because he has granted them a new birth to a living hope through Jesus’ resurrection. This new birth results in an imperishable inheritance that is now being kept in heaven for them, whom God is guarding by his power, through their faith, until salvation is revealed at the last time. These verses contain wonderful promises which we may cling to during difficult times, and they contain amazing truths about our God that should move us to worship!

### The God who is Worthy of Praise

“Blessed be” (**v 3**) literally means “to speak a good word about.” We could translate “blessed be” as “be eulogized.” When someone gives a eulogy at a funeral, they are speaking good words about the deceased. When we speak a good word about God, we are praising him or blessing him. It is fitting to speak a good word about God because of who he is, what he has done, and what he is doing. There is no Person who deserves our eulogizing more than “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!” The Father and the Son were in intimate relationship before the foundation of the world, and the

Son accomplished our salvation when, in obedience to the Father, he came to earth to be made known to the world at the appointed time (1:20). So, God is worthy of our praise because in his grace and mercy he has saved us through the work of his Son, Jesus, and has given us a new life in Christ. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!”

## **Born Again to a Living Hope**

At birth, we are identified genetically, sharing the genetic make-up of our biological parents with all its inherent strengths and weaknesses. But that is not all we inherit. Through our birth parents, we are also identified ethnically. I am Hispanic by birth, Puerto Rican to be exact. Depending on where you were born, you are likely to have a national identity, usually rewarded with citizenship. We’re also born with a **socio-economic** identity on the basis of our parents’ socio-economic standing. We derive more from our parents than we often appreciate; we may spend our lives reinforcing that inheritance, or struggling against it, but we are shaped by it our whole lives. Our birth identifies us.

Here, Peter speaks of a new birth that, as we will see, brings with it a new identity and citizenship (2:9). In this birth, God is our Father (1:17), and we are his children (v 14). Peter explains that the Father brings about the “birth” (**v 3**) of his children (2:2) by the “seed” of the word of God (1:23). This new birth, initiated by God the Father, results in a new life. Imagine what good news this is for people who feel estranged in this world. Regardless of our original birth, those born again by the word of God are born again to a new life with a new identity as God’s sons and daughters. This becomes our deepest identity.

With this new life, we also have a new hope for we have been “born again to a living hope” (**v 3**). “Hope” in the Bible is not a vague wish (“I hope we have pizza for dinner”)—it is a certain expectation of a future event. In **verse 3**, Peter grounds our living hope in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus was mocked, beaten, abused and

killed, but he did not remain in the grave. If that were the case, our faith would be in vain, and we would be a hopeless people. Without Jesus' resurrection we would still be in our sins (1 Corinthians 15:17). But Jesus did in fact rise "from the dead" (1 Peter **1:3**). Because of Jesus' resurrection, we also have the hope of our own resurrection. Death is not the last word. As the likelihood of persecution increases for Christians in the West, we need to arm ourselves with this living hope. Because of this living hope, we no longer need to fear death, much less persecution. The worst persecution can do is to kill us; and through Christ's resurrection from the dead, we can be sure that we will follow him through death and into life. That is a hope that nothing in this life can extinguish.

## **An Imperishable Inheritance**

Not only are we promised a future resurrection, though; we are also promised a future inheritance. Peter not only tells us that we will live beyond death, but also what kind of life that will be.

In the Old Testament, Israel had been promised a land as their inheritance (Joshua 11:23). However, through their rebellion the land became defiled (Jeremiah 2:7), so God scattered them abroad (Ezekiel 36:16-21). All Israel became exiles in a foreign land. Nevertheless, through the prophets God offered the hope that he would restore his people and bring them back to their inheritance (v 22-38). The prophets announced that God would raise up a king from **David's** line to regather God's people back to the place of God's presence on the basis of a new covenant (v 24-28). They would still enjoy their inheritance, one day.

Throughout his letter, as we'll see, Peter applies old covenant imagery to the Christians to whom he is writing. It is likely he is doing the same in 1 Peter **1:4** with the word "inheritance." Like Israel, Peter's readers are sojourners and exiles in their world (2:11); they are scattered (1:1). But having been incorporated into the people of God on the basis of the new covenant (v 2), and having been born again to a

living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, they, like Israel, are promised a future inheritance. Unlike Israel's inheritance, however, the inheritance of the new covenant people of God is "imperishable, undefiled, and unfading" (v 4). Our promised inheritance is not susceptible to corruption; it is eternal. It will never become defiled or unclean; it will never fade away or lose its unspoiled character.

I'm from an exotic island in the Caribbean. I've visited some beautiful places in the world—places people call "heaven on earth." But I've also been to places ruled by dictators, where people have few rights and where they long for simple freedoms and equal justice. And I've known in my own life and in those I've pastored both the beauty that this life offers, and the brokenness that too often and persistently intrudes. Our future inheritance will not only cause our

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worst experiences in this life to become distant memories; it will make even the most exotic places on earth and the finest moments of our lives here pale in comparison. Here, every earthly treasure we value fades and every human pleasure we hope in diminishes with time. Here, even the good that is done is spoiled by our flaws or those of others. Here, all that is not eternal will come to an

end. But we look forward to an inheritance which never fades, never becomes defiled, and never perishes. That is some inheritance—and it inspires in us a future-looking hope that allows us to endure even the most oppressive circumstances on earth. Though, spiritually speaking, we are presently homeless in this world, we have the hope of a future homeland, an eternal inheritance that will never lose its glory. We can be certain of our inheritance because it is being "kept in heaven" for us until it is "revealed in the last time" (v 4).

As God's "born again" children, this is our living hope. We live as exiles on this earth among people who are hostile to us because of

our faith, and we cling to the hope that our inheritance awaits us. Our inheritance is not on this earth; our inheritance is yet to be revealed on the last day when Christ himself is revealed. Until then, we sojourn on this earth with the hope of resurrection and look forward to the inheritance of the new heavens and earth.

## **Guarded by his Power**

The news of a new life that leads to a living hope and a future inheritance is all well and good, but how can we know that in the face of persecution and temptation we will persevere to the end and reach this life? After all, it is difficult to live in a world that is hostile to Christians. It is challenging to maintain a Christian witness when you are bombarded by insults, ridicule, and abuse. I can only imagine how tempting it would be to deny Christ if my life were in question—thousands of our brothers and sisters don't have to imagine that because it is their reality. A future inheritance is all very well, as long as we get there. How can we know that we will?

The good news, says Peter, is that the God who keeps our inheritance secure in heaven (**v 4**) is also the God who keeps his children secure on earth during their sojourn “for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (**v 5**). No matter how hard our life on this earth may be, we can cling to the promise that God keeps us. The God who chose us before the foundation of the earth and has caused us to be born again to a living hope “guards” or “protects” us by his power until we obtain our inheritance. The word translated “guarded” in **verse 5** is also used in 2 Corinthians 11:32 of the governor “guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize” Paul. To “guard” means “to keep watch over” in order to defend against anything bad that may happen. That is what God promises to do for his children. And yet, we know that God's protection does not mean we will avoid suffering (1 Peter 4:12). So, how does God guard us if Christian suffering is to be expected?

The greatest threat to perseverance is unbelief. If we lose faith, then we will not receive our reward (Hebrews 3:7-19). But Peter

promises us that will God guard us “by [his] power ... through faith” (1 Peter **1:5**). In other words, while we must continue in faith in order to receive our future salvation, Peter reminds us that no matter how hard life may become, God sustains our faith by his power. When **trials** come and doubts arise, we are not left to sustain our own faith in our own power. By his power, God guards our faith such that no trial or suffering we may face will cause us to lose it. Here is a glorious promise for every Christian—the God who gave us saving faith as a gift will also sustain and strengthen our faith through suffering until that day when we receive our imperishable, undefiled, unfading inheritance.

God knows what threatens our faith, so he guards us during those trials, sustaining our faith by his power. For Christians, suffering is inevitable, but God promises to watch over us. This is the promise Peter’s readers needed to hear as they faced persecution in Asia Minor; this is the promise that we need to hear today as we likely face increasing trouble in the West. Through the resurrection, we can look through any suffering and see our inheritance, readied for us by the God who guards us as he guides us home. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

## Questions for reflection

1. How can embracing this new identity as God’s child help you if and when you struggle with lack of self-worth or with pride?
2. In a world dominated by materialism and the accumulation of wealth, how should knowing that we have a future incorruptible inheritance affect a Christian’s view of money and possessions in this life?
3. How has this passage both excited you about where you’re heading, and increased your confidence that you’ll get there? What difference to your feelings and/or actions will this make today?